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VOLUME II

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EDITED BY THE REV.
JOHN HENRY BURN, B.D., F.R.S.E.
Editor of "The Churchman's Pulpit."

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
VOLUME II
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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter V. (continued)

The Gift of Repentance

BY RIGHT REV. E. HAROLD BROWNE, D.D.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus," &c.—Acts v. 30, 31.

It is not unlikely that the words of St. Peter referred to two passages in the Prophetic Scriptures. One, "Thou hast ascended up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, even for Thine enemies." The other, that of Daniel, "Unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks." The reference to the former (Psa. lxviii.) is obvious. That to the latter seems probable from the uses of the term *Prince* of our Saviour, and of a Greek word to signify Prince, very similar to that used in the Greek translation of Daniel.

Both references, observed by those who knew the Law, would remind them that "Christ *ought* to have suffered and to have entered into His glory." And so St. Peter's answer to the Sanhedrin became a pregnant Sermon; like the song of the Psalmist, of judgment and of mercy. It was of judgment, for it fearlessly charged the sin of crucifying the Son of God upon the Jews and on their rulers; and it spoke of Him as risen again and raised up on high to be a Prince, and so doubtless an Avenger to punish the impenitent. But it was still more of mercy; for it spoke of One, Who had at Bethlehem brought down Heaven to earth, and now had gone aloft, taking up earth to Heaven; and Who in that exalted glory was not merely Messiah the Prince, to sit upon the throne of David and to reign for ever; but was empowered to pour down even upon sinful Israel the princely largesses of repentance and pardon. So was He not a Prince only, but also a Saviour, and His last Prayer upon the Cross on Calvary was heard and answered, when He prayed His Father to forgive even those who crucified Him.

It is hard to say what great practical truth of the Gospel is not set forth in these words of my text. It convinced of sin: it warned of judgment: it spoke of Christ as dying, as risen, as re-ascended to the Father, and of Christ as ready to give the grace of repentance, and with repentance forgiveness of sins.

It would not be possible in a single sermon to enlarge upon every portion of such a fruitful theme. Every portion indeed is closely intertwined with other portions; and what tells of one can scarcely be silent of the rest. If we speak of the gift, we cannot be unmindful of the Giver; and no one gift of God is intended to stand alone.

Indeed, to pave the way and to prevent misapprehension, let us notice that, here and everywhere, every good and every perfect gift is from above. All

that is evil comes from beneath : but whatever can obliterate the evil comes down from Heaven. Hence it is, that whilst my text ascribes to Jesus the power and the will to pardon sinners, it equally ascribes to Him the giving to them repentance. Sin springs up of natural growth in their own hearts : but repentance can come only from Him, Whom that sin once nailed upon the Cross. All that sin has done and every day is doing against Him, though surely it moves His hatred for its foulness, yet moves, too, His pity for the sinner, whose sufferings He well knows, because He Himself has borne them. If any sinners could be without the reach and boundary line of mercy, we might suppose them that sinful and adulterous generation, whose obstinacy and unthankfulness had so often moved the tears and called forth the indignation of the Saviour, that people sought and pleaded with in vain, guiltier than Tyre and Sidon, fouler than Sodom and Gomorrah, because sinning against brighter light, and greater grace and more fully manifested love. And yet it was to those very men, ay ! to the very worst and guiltiest of them, the chief priests and the Sadducees, that Peter in my text preached Christ as a Saviour, offered Him to them for their Prince and their Leader, and assured them that He would bestow upon them from the Father repentance and forgiveness.

Surely then, we may well say, no one need despair. The death and the rising up again of Jesus our Saviour does indeed preach to us an awful sermon against those murderous sins in our own hearts and consciences, which brought Him down from Heaven, and nailed Him on the Cross, and laid Him in the grave. It does indeed speak of the sin and the peril of those who neglect a crucified Saviour, who despise a risen Prince. But it tells of a place in Heaven for returning sinners—of a heart there yearning for their return, and open to welcome them when they come. It tells of a peace which the Father has made for us with Himself by the sacrifice of His Son, and of a way carved out for us by which we may walk up to God, and which no wayfaring man though a fool could err in, since even that worst folly of persecuting impiety did not close it up against Annas and Caiaphas and the crucifiers.

It is surely no imaginary case ; indeed, it must be within the experience of us all that men, especially young men, fall into errors they cannot but deplore, often make feeble efforts to free themselves, begin a little course of improvement, then fall by force of temptation ; do this, perhaps, again and again ; till at length they grow wearied and dissatisfied ; give way to despondency ; and from despondency turn back to recklessness. And, it may be, there is not one amongst us who has not felt at times that sin and the world seem too strong for us, that thorough repentance seems hopeless and impossible. We have tried it, and failed, and sat down disheartened, and have at times been tempted to give up our efforts and to yield to indifference. But, surely, in such tempers of mind, in such a perilous condition of our soul, what encouragement might we gain, if we could but take home to us the cheering words of St. Peter, that He, Who came down, and lived and died for us, is now risen and ascended up on high, on purpose to *give us* from His own vast treasury of goodness that very grace, which we have found so hard, so hopeless to search for ourselves. If we are weak, yet surely He is strong. If we are poor, He is rich. If we are helpless, God has laid help upon One that is mighty. If we in our efforts have made many efforts failures, yet, if we will wait as pensioners on His bounty, if we will receive the gifts which He will give us, if we will place ourselves under His guidance and rest upon His strength, we need not doubt, that that repentance and that pardon, offered even to those whose taunts goaded Pilate into crucifying Him, may be, in all their fullness, ours—ours who seek Him and hope for

Him and long, if we could but find the strength and the heart for it, to serve Him, and to live to Him.

But I fear that another danger is common, perhaps commoner than that I have been speaking of. There is the gulph of despondency on the one side, but the high headland of presumption is on the other. If some sink down and perish, because repentance seems so difficult, not a few make shipwreck of their souls, because it seems so easy.

It is true that errors in the head generally spring from errors in the heart; and that the first step to knowing is to do the will of God. Yet an error in the judgment will hinder even the honest Christian's course; and it will obviously gather a mist and darkness round the path of the half-hearted and the wanderer. Now there is some little ambiguity in the meaning of the word *Repent*. The Greek word signifies a change of mind; and some of the most learned of the Greek fathers have defined it in the Scriptures as "the turning of the heart to God, a deliverance from sin, and a beginning of righteousness." Even the earlier Latin writers seemed aware of this significance. But the popular use of the Latin word, *penitentia*, and of the English word, *repentance*, has so affected Western Theology, that in the Roman translations the solemn exhortations of Scripture have lost their force, and from being warnings to repent have become injunctions only to do penance. And even amongst ourselves, since to repent of an act means often merely to regret that we have done it; so to repent of sin, even in the very language of Theology, often means no more than to be affected with sorrow for it.

Yet, I believe, that careful inquiry could not fail to convince us, that the word which St. Peter uses, and which in my text is rendered *repentance*, that that word is never used by the writers of the New Testament in the sense of unavailing, impractical regret, of mere sorrow, however acute, nor even of the deepest remorse.

Neither the sorrow of Esau, nor the conscience-stroke of Judas, went beyond that sorrow of the world which worketh death. There is, indeed, the Apostle tells us, a godly sorrow which worketh repentance—a repentance never to be repented of—a repentance which has in it nothing to regret and which will never be regretted (2 Cor. vii. 10). But it may lead us into great errors in belief and practice, if we confound regret, which is but the first imperfect step towards conversion, with that hearty repentance, which is indeed itself conversion of soul.

My brethren, if you are not now in the road to God, if you are not struggling upwards, striving for an entrance by the strait gate to Heaven, I know that unless you are utterly thoughtless and hopeless, your hope is, that ere long you will turn, repent and be pardoned. There is not one among you to whom in some form or other the tempter whispers not such thoughts as these. You know the secrets of your own hearts, and the burden your own heart is bearing. Each of you has some darling idolatry, some "cunning bosom sin," some treasure upon earth laid up in the storehouse of your soul. It may be love of pleasure, it may be ambition, it may be pride, it may be worship of intellect, it may be any one of this legion of evils banded together against human souls; or, God knows, it may be the whole legion at once encamped within your hearts. To you at present they may seem pleasant guests. They bear a joyous countenance, and they have a cheerful voice. Yet in your own inmost conscience you know that they are not safe guests. You know that those that follow them go down to the paths of death. Why then do you not at once awake? Why do you not fight and drive away your enemies, instead of sitting down softly to

sup with them, and taking from their hands that cup which you know is drugged with deadly draughts? Why, but because you do not believe that delay is destructive; because you think that for a little while you may yield to their enchantments, and yet at length wake up and shake off their spells, and drive them from their strongholds? And is not this, because you have taken a false view of the force of sin and of the real nature of repentance?

And yet it does not need even the Gospel to tell us what force evil habits have when once contracted, how they grow daily more and more into our nature, taking deep hold on us, and transforming us into themselves. It is an important part of our moral constitution and of our moral responsibility, that by performing actions we contract habits and that habits contracted become nature.

A heathen moralist could tell us that of our single actions we are masters always; of our habits only at first. That is to say, a single action, not yet grown into a habit, can be performed or can be resisted by the strength of human will. But if actions have become habits, the will is no longer good against them. It has given itself up and yielded to be their slave. You will, perhaps, say that he said so, because he was a heathen, and because he knew not of the Christian grace of repentance. Be it so. Let us admit that Aristotle, at least, knew the strength of nature, if he did not know the strength of grace. Doubtless he did not know of that, which is *our* hope and comfort, of One Whom God hath exalted to lead and to save us; to give us repentance for the future and pardon for the past, to "bless us by turning us away from our iniquities." But if he knew not this, he was ignorant, too, of that abuse of God's blessings to us—that new habit, which, like a canker on a good tree, has grown out of our very Christianity—the continuing in sin that grace may abound. The heathen, who knew only the strength of his own will to resist a single temptation, and the impotence of his own will to overcome a habit formed by yielding to temptation, would, perhaps, have been amazed, and if he had been gifted with prophetic foresight, and had seen in the vista of future ages men growing up with a new light, with a new power, with a new hope; but, instead of using them to check the first risings of passion, and to prevent evil actions from becoming evil customs, only yielding to passion and letting it grow into a life, because it was just possible that by a power more than human they might one day be brought back again, and converted and restored.

My younger brethren, you indeed are not the only men who put off repentance and say of it "hereafter"; but to you, perhaps, of all men it is the most natural. Life seems long, passion seems powerful, religion better suited to a time of life more sober and serious. Even that spring of hope, which is the blessed portion of the young, tempts you to look forward to a future time for better thoughts, and better deeds, and nobler impulses. Is there such a time? If you are unholy now, what is there in later life to bring more holiness or more desire of holiness? Suppose it to be true, that your passions are strongest now; do passions grow weaker by indulgence? Are there no instances of aged sensualists? men, of whom, perhaps, in early life better hopes had been formed—hopes, that the levity of youth would pass away, and that with sober judgment would come sounder thoughts and better lives?

Or if it be true that the young have more danger from the temptations of the senses, is there anything in growth and age to lessen that *self-love*, which is the root of all sin? It may be Protean in its shapes, but its last form is only fiercer than its first. And if age has no such alchymy as to turn the love of self into the love of God, then is there no reasonable hope, that growing years should bring with them any nearer approach to God and goodness.

Will you say that there is hope in Christ's will to pardon and in His powers to convert and strengthen you? But is His power less in youth than in manhood, or in manhood than in age? Why think you that His will is less or that His hand is shortened now, when your sins are fewer, and your heart, I trust, yet tender and not time-hardened, and that His season to help you will be only when you have sinned deeper and deeper, and your soul has become like that wayside in the parable, trodden down and hardened by the much trampling of cares and pleasures and worldly business and carnal sins? Was that the state of the hearer's heart, of which the great Sower of the seed gave hope that it would prove fruitful?

Believe me, my brethren, believe the experience of every Christian older than yourselves; that, though there are trials and temptations and difficulties proper to the young, there are yet more and greater and more dangerous to the more matured. Do not think that the voice of youthful pleasure is more dangerous than the poisonous drugs of worldliness, ambition, and that crowd of evils which clog and stupify and deaden the soul in middle life, or than that listless indifference which creeps upon and overpowers the aged. In youth at worst there are some nobler impulses, some generous feelings, some hope of better things, which, if not acted on, soon pass away, and leave a blank and a void and a conscience all the harder because it has not listened to them. For most assuredly every good thought issuing in good action is a fount of blessing; but every good thought which passes off from us unheeded and disobeyed becomes a stagnant pool, festering and poisoning and deadening. Yes! letting other things be equal, though the aged saint is far holier than the pious youth, yet the aged man or the man of middle age, if not penitent, converted, sanctified, is far worse, far harder, far more impenetrable by grace and goodness, than he was in the sunniest and the most thoughtless days of his boyhood. The good impulses and the generous feelings neglected have left him a lower, a baser, a more degraded being; not only farther from godliness, but farther from mere earthly goodness.

And oh! my young Christian brethren, if the folly of the world tempts you, as how many it does tempt, to assume the senseless, swaggering, rakish air of men hardened by worldliness—the air in fact of men of this world rather than men of God; oh! think, that you are thereby only striving to disguise the best feelings and the noblest sentiments and the brightest ornaments of your own age, mimicking, what happily you do not yet possess, the worst manners of the worst men. And to imitate their manners is the sure way to sink down to their morals, and to inherit their misery.

Be assured, that in early life every act and thought makes a deep furrow. leaves a deep impress on the soul. Afterwards thoughts throng so thickly, actions are so manifold, that memory seems to have no room for them. They chase one another off like drops of water on the surface of a mirror. They pass away, and their impressions seem to pass with them. But the older we grow the more our mind seems to go backward to our youth. Whilst all later memories fade away, the memory of earlier days only grows more marked, more vivid. And does not this fact alone prove how deep the work of early days is done? If its work is so written upon the memory, can we doubt that it is written in the soul; and that, if not effaced, it writes the soul's destiny? If there be no other book of remembrance kept on high, there is at least a record written for ever upon the character, by every thought and word and act, which has gone to form that character. And the thoughts and words and deeds of youth are those which leave their traces deepest, and stamp most indelibly the heart with their images.

One word more to the same purpose. You are now, I trust, in the light of Christian truth, whether you are obedient to the light or not. The way of life is yet before you, and the way of death. But truth does not dwell merely in the intellect. It is not plain to one, whose eye has become darkened by sin. How know you, then, that you shall always retain God in your knowledge? To follow evil, and in your life to deny God, to hold on to sensuality or worldliness, instead of turning to faith and holiness, is to run a fearful risk of falling into error, perhaps even into that hopeless pitfall of unbelief, which is ever spread before the feet of unstable souls. Most men, who have made shipwreck of faith, have first made shipwreck of a good conscience. And if, whilst you are idling, and dallying, and dreaming, your whole faith has been lost to you, where will your hope be gone, that you will have repentance and forgiveness from Him, Who indeed can give it, but in Whom you no longer believe, and so to Whom you cannot have recourse?

But the very mode, in which it pleases God to work repentance in us, is another argument against the delay of it. God, Who made us, has not made us mere pieces of mechanism, but has made us like Himself, free, moral beings. If then He converts us from the evil, to which our own abuse of freedom may have hurried us, He will surely do so by a process suited to that nature, which He Himself has created in us. Christ is indeed exalted to be a Saviour, but also to be a Prince: and Prince means not ruler only, but leader, guide, captain, general too. And it is those, who are subjected to His guidance, that partake of His salvation. Again, it is by the influence of His Holy Spirit that He turns the heart from evil to good, from sin to repentance, from Satan to God. And surely the Holy Spirit works, not as physical forces act on inert matter, but by that moral influence which a moral being can exercise on moral beings. So then, in repentance or conversion of heart, there is a work to be wrought within us, undoing that evil work which evil passions have wrought before. The new Covenant is described by the Prophet and by the Apostle (see Heb. viii.) as the writing by God's Spirit of a new law within our hearts. In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul teaches us that, whereas by nature a law of sin reigns within us, that, which alone can free us from it, is the counter-law of the Spirit of life (Romans viii. 2), which defacing sin's iron characters shall write its own upon the heart. And in the Epistle to Titus he says that "the Grace of God, which bringeth unto all men salvation, teaches, or rather *disciplines* us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Tit. ii. 11, 12).

But if so; if Christ delivers us from evil by taking us under His guidance and teaching us to fight against enemies, which have heretofore had the mastery of us; if the Holy Spirit works our conversion by a moral influence gently exercised upon our wills, turning them from sin to sorrow for sin, and from sorrow to deep contrition of heart, and from that godly sorrow to a repentance not to be repented of; if the grace of God which bringeth salvation shows itself by a training and disciplining of the soul, to deny ungodliness and to live soberly, righteously and godly; what madness must it be in us to go on now fighting against Christ, cultivating all unholy thoughts, disciplining ourselves in all ungodliness, doing more and more deeply a work, which must be undone if we can ever be saved. Without questioning the power or the will of God to convert us, must we not see that the longer we persevere in the path of evil, the harder it must be to turn out of it? that the deeper sin is graven in the soul, the more painful must be the process by which its writing can be erased? that if the road of repentance is difficult to all of us, to the dilatory it must become every hour rougher and darker and more dangerous?

And of that last forlorn hope of impenitent sinners, a death-bed repentance ; let us not doubt indeed that repentance, come when it may, is ever accompanied with forgiveness : but what we must doubt is, whether real repentance is ever to be looked for in death. Sorrow for sin never fails to come then : and so, if that were all that could be wanted, we might believe that well-nigh all men would be saved. Then would there be no need to strive and struggle for the strait gate ; for the gate would be wide and the way broad, and many indeed would go in thereat.

If without reproach I may speak that which I have heard and testify that which I have seen, I can say with the most earnest and solemn assertion of its truth, that I have witnessed the death-bed of many an ungodly man and of many a devout Christian ; that I have hoped, because Christ it is Who giveth repentance, and He may give it when we have no right to look for it ; but that I have many times heard the dying sinner say, “ It is too late—It is too late ” ; and that I have heard the dying saint say, not once but oftentimes, “ If I had not sought my Saviour in my health, I could not seek Him now when my strength is failing, and pain is distracting me, and I can scarce collect my thoughts even to pray ; but now I can hope in Him, and rest patiently upon Him, and die happily in Him ; because I found Him in my life, and He has not left me, and He will never leave me in my death.”

Only one word more. The common error with regard to repentance is one which adds to the gloominess of the view which so scares us from religion. If that, which Scripture almost identifies with Christianity, be looked on by us as mere grief and regret, we cannot help but feel a reluctance to lay hold of it. Doubtless, a course of sin cannot well pass into a course of piety, but through the rough road of sorrow. But that change of heart, which repentance really means, and that change of life, which is its constant comrade, is the very reverse of sorrowful, for it is always rejoicing. The pleasures of sin are sure to bring disquietude ; and in its merriest moments there is a hidden hollow in the heart. But the very sorrows of religion are comforting ; and its joys bring no misgiving or regrets. Every man, who has once tried its ways, knows that the only pain connected with them is when his own self-willed wanderings lead him out of them. If we could always be walking with our Saviour we should never lack the comforts of His presence.

Neutrality

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

“ *Refrain from these men, and let them alone.*”—Acts v. 38.

Great interest attaches to St. Paul's tutor. He was a famous Jewish Rabbi. St. Luke describes him as “ a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people.” St. Paul considers it a sufficient proof of his own early orthodoxy to say that he was “ brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.” We must not conclude, from his conduct on the occasion before us, that he was in any sense really open to Christian conviction. A prayer of his is on record, composed (it is said) with special reference to Christians, beginning with the words, “ Let there be no hope to them who apostatise from the true religion.” Yet, on this one occasion at least, he shows a quality rare among Pharisees—not universal, alas ! among Christians—that of fairness, of calmness, of candour. The infant Gospel was indebted to him for the liberty, perhaps the life, of St. Peter himself. He

bids the Sanhedrin, his fellow-councillors, "refrain from these men, and let them alone"—wait and see what becomes of Christianity—whether it will stand the test of time—whether it has this mark of truth upon it, permanence—or whether, like a hundred ephemeral ebullitions of human enthusiasm, it spends itself, dies out, and comes to nought.

The argument was not only useful—it was just. The test of time is a true criterion. There is scarcely an event, there is scarcely a character, there is scarcely an action, of which the first idea is the final. The just judge must wait. How will the same thing look five years later?

When Gamaliel referred the decision to time, he gave judgment for the Gospel. It has stood the test. Everything was against it. Opinion, authority, probability, what called itself reason, what called itself religion—all denounced it. What chance was there for a faith so introduced, so supported, so circumstanced? We read Gamaliel's counsel seriously—but it might have been ironical. There is no evidence that he himself ever accepted Christ. Liberal, cautious, candid, he was not in the highest sense earnest. He was tolerant of suspense. When he referred the matter to time, he threw off responsibility. He did not see that it was life or death to decide. He spoke as a politician, as an administrator, as a statesman; he did not speak as a man responsible for his opinion, as a sinner doomed to die, and on his way to judgment. Looking at Christianity in the abstract, looking at it as on its trial, looking at it as the rival of other systems, and with reference to its eventual defeat or victory, he proposed a criterion which was reasonable and sensible, a criterion which the Gospel accepts, and by which, eighteen centuries later, it bids us all to decide.

Christianity has stood Gamaliel's test. "Let alone," it has not "come to nought": its enemies have not "overthrown" it: it has lived, it has grown, it has wrought, it has influenced: in its train have come everywhere liberty and civilization, humanity and charity, rest of mind and peace with God: where it has not been so in fact, there its own principles have been belied by its professors: on the whole, so marked have been its blessings, that philanthropists have sung its praise, and philosophers have at least wished it true.

Nor can it be said that accident has favoured its course, or that, where it has been accepted, it has been on trust. No religion was ever so severely handled. Its claims were exclusive, and challenged antagonism. It would not seat itself in one Pantheon with Paganism, as the best of religions, yet still one of many. It would not make friends even with Judaism, whose divine authorship it recognised. Its very charity was a self-assertion. It claimed to be love, as revealing love. Its records were sifted, were scrutinised, everywhere and in all ages, with the double microscope of love and hate. The word was "tried to the uttermost"—"if anything came out of that crucible, it must have been gold. Yet never was the Bible more loved, more revered, more used, more obeyed than now, in this untrusting, this sceptical, this incredulous age: the Bible, like the Gospel which it enshrines, has not come to nought: it, too, has stood the test of time—and they who fight against its "work" or its "counsel" must take heed, Gamaliel's being the criterion, "lest haply they be found even to fight against God."

Gamaliel, in those earliest days of the Gospel, had some excuse perhaps for postponement. It had been better, no doubt—better for his soul, better for his country—if he, too, had gone into the evidences which he thus threw wholly upon the decision of the future. But we have not even his excuse. His criterion has been applied, and we see the issue. The work of Christ, the counsel of the Crucified, has not come to nought. It would have done so by this time

if it ever could. It has been tried by time, and it lives. It has been tried by persecution, tried by contempt, tried by reasoning, tried by ridicule—and still it is, and prevails. How long are we to expect? How often shall we, too, send to Christ, saying, “Art Thou He that shall come?” It is not as though we were immortal in the body. It is not as though we could hang on, unconcerned spectators, till some indefinite nameless day, when the battle shall have been fought out, and Christ or the devil remain visible victor upon the blood-stained field. We are responsible, responsible in soul and eternal life, for settling the question for ourselves. We admire candour, but we admire not indifference. There are subjects, there is one subject, on which to be neutral is to take a side. Christ Himself says, “He that is not with Me is against Me.” It is idle to dream of some day of decision, when the great controversy shall have fought itself out, so that he who runs may read the issue. No man in his senses will postpone the momentous questions of this life—his profession, for instance, or his marriage—until he can foresee with absolute certainty whether the one shall be prosperous, whether the other shall be happy. So it is with the soul. What is right, and what is true—what my duty is to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: what my belief is, who is my God, and whether I have a Saviour; these are urgent things, which only the gambler can trifle with. With certainty or with probability, with a degree of certainty, less or greater, these matters must be settled, settled on the instant; inasmuch as, if there be a judgment, it must take account of them; and if there be a Saviour, He must demand the heart.

On these topics I view with suspicion a candour which can smile and wait. It is not necessary for us to settle which is in the right, or whether both are in the wrong, of two belligerent kings. It is not necessary for us to have an opinion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused prisoner, who has his jury to try and his judge to sentence him. It is not necessary for us to be positive as to each point of Church-government, or each theory of Inspiration or Atonement. But it is necessary that we should not stand by and look on while right and wrong, while truth and falsehood, while God and the devil, wage their mighty battle in this soul, in this life. In this war there are no neutrals: he who sides not with Christ has already enlisted himself against Him. “Who is on the Lord’s side?” is the cry which rings in all ears: it is not the Gamaliels or the Gallios, it is not even the Nicodemus who comes by night, or timidly argues for a hearing—it is the Elijah girded for conflict, and asking, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” it is the Paul, convinced and converted, counting all things loss for the excellency of Christ, and dying daily if he may but win Him—it is these who are the men, not more of faith than of reason; these who run the race, and these who win the crown. The mischief is infinite of the mere *refrainers* and *letters alone*, when the subject is the Bible, the Gospel, the Saviour. Open hostility is better—may be truer, nobler, safer—than this, not armed, perhaps, but *secure neutrality*. These men are not fighting; they are pausing. They are intelligent men, tolerant men, candid men—open to conviction, open and waiting for it. Oh! we know the sound so well in these days. These men have a uniform. They have their own badge, and signal, and watchword. They dishearten the true soldier more than any foe. They make him feel himself irrational, unreasoning, credulous. They leave upon his mind, struggle against it as he may, an impression that his defences may be unsound, that his ground may be untenable. Let me see my foe, meet him face to face—and I shall not flinch or quail. But this weapon from a mile off, out of sight, aimed by a secret engine, by a skulking foe—how can I deal with it? Be men! Choose your side deliberately, gravely, anxiously; but in this greatest of all battles, when

it is chosen, fight for it to the death! Gamaliel's test has been applied, and Christ and Christ's Gospel has stood it. There remains now but Gamaliel's caution—"Lest haply ye be found even to fight against God!"

Gamaliel's Counsel

BY VERY REV. F. W. FARRAR, D.D.

"*Refrain from these men, and let them alone,*" &c.—Acts v. 38, 39.

These words which, at the first glance, seem to be so simple and so undeniable, have given rise to the greatest differences of opinion. Some have represented them as an irresistible argument for tolerance; others have reprobated them as a feeble excuse for sloth. Some have charged Gamaliel with speaking thus only as a Pharisee that he might embarrass the rival sect of Sadducees; others have asserted that he was secretly a Christian. Now into the motives of Gamaliel I shall not enter; it is absurd to censure him upon insufficient data, and though most certainly he was not a Christian, yet he, like all men, is entitled to the rule of Christian charity, which hopeth and believeth all things, which has a lofty scorn for evil surmisings, which loathes the spirit that would fix all doubt upon the darker side. But assuming that the motives of Gamaliel were sincere and pure, his actual words are well worth our consideration; and, if we examine them, we shall find, if I mistake not, that, applied as he applied them, they contain both as a guide for action and as a result of experience, a singular mixture of truth and error.

If, for instance, they were meant to explain that *patience* is often the surest policy, they were wise. It is often by far the most sensible course to let things alone. Flagrant imposture does generally unmask itself; vaulting ambition does overleap itself; foolish fanaticism does flare itself away. We in England more often than other nations, admit and act upon this wise principle. We do not take the trouble to contradict utterly senseless assertions; we do not think it worth while to persecute utterly ungrounded delusions. We do not enlist the sympathy of pity on the side of folly, by making a martyr of every designing demagogue, or every deluded impostor. We constantly rely on the general rectitude of humanity: we quietly wait for the sure and rapid prevalence of good feeling and common sense. Intemperate opposition and fussy violence are generally the signs of weakness: conciliatory calmness, generous concession, quiet confidence are always a proof of strength.

Or again, if Gamaliel wished by his argument to strengthen the cause of *toleration*, he was far before his age, and he was splendidly in the right. For toleration does not come naturally to us. Though, to the end of time, it is certain that men will not be brought to think alike, yet also to the end of time some men will suppose that they in particular have a monopoly of truth; and it is in religious matters that these convictions work most mischievously. Oh! what a catalogue of deadly errors, oh! what a chapter of colossal crimes might have been obliterated from the history of the Church of Christ, if she had not taken so many centuries to learn that to suppress opinion by violence is always criminal; that carnal weapons ought never to be abused against spiritual beliefs; that perfect unity of faith is a thing impossible, but that liberty and charity are faith's eldest children, and that liberty is the dearest birthright, and charity the loftiest virtue, of mankind. For since all experience has shown that often and often in their blindness and ignorance, men have been ruining holiness when they

fancied that they were advancing it, and fighting for Satan when they imagined themselves to be soldiers of God, to punish opinion, as opinion is always both criminal and useless—criminal because it violates man's involuntary prerogative; useless because no amount of cruelty can ever check the free development of thought. And thus, in spite of loud voices of Church or sect, England has long learnt to admire the wisdom of her great king, who, refusing ever to persecute for conscience sake, declared "we could never be of that mind that violence was suited to the advancing of true religion, nor do we intend that our authority should ever be a tool to the irregular passions of any party."

Or, once more, if Gamaliel was only demanding *time for deliberation*, if he was warning against blind precipitancy, if he meant that as yet it was impossible to decide about the truth or falsehood of the new doctrine, so that its immediate suppression would be hasty and premature, then again his words were wise. This was the sense in which Luther urged them upon the Elector of Treves, when he was hesitating how to act towards the Reformation. Half the errors of men are due to over-hasty conclusions. How many truths, now known to be irrefragably true, have been received at first with a shout of derision; how many assertions, once believed to be absolutely undeniable, are now seen to have been intolerably false! If then we cannot, and ought not, at once to make up our minds about new views, how are we to act towards them? Our Lord Himself has given us one perfect test—one Lydian touchstone—whereby we may always tell whether a doctrine be gold or dross. It is in the words, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Let us not at once assume that a doctrine is wrong because it goes against our party or our opinions. Let us examine it; examine it without prejudice; examine it in different points of view; examine it humbly, because without humility there can be no progress; examine it sincerely, because without candour there can be no insight; examine it prayerfully, because without prayer there can be no illumination; and if even then we think it mistaken, still if we see that it produces holy lives and generous instincts in those that hold it, let us beware how we attack or persecute it, lest, while we are only intending to burn a bramble we consume a cedar, or while we wish to cut down a thistle we destroy a vine.

It will be seen then that, judged by the circumstances under which they were uttered, the words of Gamaliel are capable of more than one wise interpretation, as recommending the policy of patience, as inculcating the duty of toleration, as showing the wisdom of caution: and surely, even so far, in days like these which ring with controversy on every side—in days when every thoughtful man is so often called upon to decide between conflicting views—in days when Churches are split up into parties, and religions into sects—in days which show on the one hand so much apathetic indifference, on the other so much mistaken zeal—the moments cannot have been wasted in which we have tried to arrive at true principles for action in matters of opinion, and have seen that with patience, with toleration, and with candour, we cannot greatly err. But I think that we may derive from these verses yet deeper and more personal lessons; such as affect not merely our way of dealing with opinions, but our whole course of life.

For a good conclusion may be supported by a bad argument, and, if we examine Gamaliel's arguments with reference to the purpose, I think that we must admit that they are utterly false, if he meant that the mere temporary success or unsuccess of a doctrine was any test of its truth; while yet they are gloriously true, if they be applied to things in their issues, and to the whole history of mankind. If Gamaliel meant that we need never meddle with a belief because if

it be bad it will at once fail ; or that we need not take the trouble to make up our minds because the logic of events will at once decide for us—then what he said was foolish and pernicious—pernicious as obliterating the moral criterion of truth ; foolish because then our opinions would but waver as a wave of the sea, with the varying changes of accident, and the feeble proclivities of mobs. For, as far as the fortunes of the moment are concerned, it cannot be laid down too clearly or too emphatically, that they furnish us with no guide whatever for a truthful judgment. This was the false and immoral argument which the Pharisees thought it sufficient to oppose to the wise caution of Nicodemus—that Jesus could not be a prophet because none of the rulers or of the Pharisees had believed on Him. It is the foolish argument by which “ the deep slumber of decided opinions ” has tried in every age to stifle every species of new discovery. Who has not heard influential names used to crush sound arguments, and venerable prescriptions to prevent beneficent changes ? If a student lights on some great theory subversive of common belief, it is thought enough to ask him, “ Whether he thinks himself wiser than all his race ? ” and it is thus that too often blind Authority beats with his staff the child that might have led him. This is why the martyrs of science have been so numerous. This is why a Vesalius, the founder of anatomy, dies in starvation and exile ; and a Christopher Columbus has to beg from monastery to monastery ; and a Roger Bacon and a Galileo spend their best years in contest and end their embittered days in prison. This is why, in professional life, a Hervey and a Jenner are persecuted and vilified. This is why in matters of religion a great soul can utter no new or neglected truth without waking the fury of offended prejudice. Let a man sail with the stream, let him float down the swift current of common-place, let him answer his audience according to their idols, and offer them no truths save such as are fashionable at the moment, and he will have nothing to fear. But, if he run counter to the error of the day, though he can no longer be burnt or executed, his writings will be the butt of bitter criticism, and his name the signal for calumnious abuse—happy for him if he be not dragged, like Luther, before formidable tribunals, or execrated, like Whitfield, by dormant Churches. Oh, let us not be deceived by the empty sophism that unsuccess is the stamp of falsehood ! Let us learn that there is no success worth having save to do the thing which is right, come of it what may. For again and again in this world's history there have been triumphant tyrannies, and again and again there have been martyred truths. Is there one of this world's best and greatest who has not been crowned, as it were, with thorns ? Look at Moses, alone amid the insolence of an apostate people ; look at Elijah, at Horeb, with his “ I, even I only, am left ” ; look at the Baptist, when at the order of a drunken king, and the petition of a dancing girl, the sword falls, and the life of the greatest prophet is shorn away. Or look again at the dread fate of every single man, and every single society, that dared during many centuries to attack the tyrannies of a corrupted Church. Think how often, before the Reformation, the earliest reformers were crushed or slain. First, Arnold of Brescia is seized and executed ; then Fra Dolcino is torn to pieces with pincers ; then the valleys of the Waldenses are bathed with blood ; then the ashes of Wickliffe are dug up and scattered to the winds ; then the great and good Savonarola is tortured into retraction, and burnt with ignominy ; then John Huss is tied to the stake by a Council of ecclesiastics ; then Cranmer and Ridley and Latimer kindle in England an unextinguishable flame ; and so the hideous tale goes on, till, long after the Reformation has won its way, we have massacres of St. Bartholomew, and the bones of the saints of Piedmont lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold. Shall we then make

immediate success a test of truth? Nay, need we in refutation of such a fancy look any farther than the Cross? Could any failure have looked so terrible as that? There, on the symbol of the extremest infamy and the instrument of the most awful anguish, hung, amid uttermost outrage, the Saviour of the world. For Him no voice had broken the howl of "Crucify!" King and Procurator, Jew and Roman, Priest and Sadducee, were united in murdering Him, and when the Shepherd was smitten the sheep of the flock were scattered abroad. So that none must be the servants of truth in the hope of earthly prosperity, for again and again we see the most glorious certainties crushed for a time under loads of oppression and infamy and the most deadly errors, crowned for a time with irresistible success!

Are we then to conclude that Truth has failed at least as often as it has succeeded, and that there is no value at all in Gamaliel's principle, that what is bad will come to nought? Not so! Look again, not at the brief threescore years of human life, but at the centuries and the millenniums of humanity, and then we may derive a strong encouragement, and a glorious hope, by seeing that there is, undoubtedly, "a stream of tendency that makes for right"—a light "that shines on patiently and impartially, justifying or condemning by simply showing all things in the slow history of their ripening." We see then that in the long run evil cannot persist because God is against it; that Right may be opposed often, but extinguished never; that Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Take the cases we have considered. Take science. On the one side let there be but a single unknown thinker, striking out some new thought in his solitary cell, and on the other, all the banded forces of prerogative and prejudice; let kings fight against it; let priests denounce, let fools deride; yet to that thought—against the very evidence of their senses, the world comes round. Take a professional discovery: the discoverer will often have to face a storm of opposition and jealousy; yet before a generation is over his view will have been adopted, and the goal of yesterday will be the starting point of to-morrow. Or, take again, the case of religious truth. The man whose eyes are open may, as we have seen, be burned as a heretic, or imprisoned as a rebel; but others will rise to snatch the torch of enlightenment from his dying hand, and wave it into triumphant flame. Reformers are murdered, but the Reformation is accomplished; and as there might never have been a Huss if there had not been a Wickliffe, so there might never have been a Luther if there had not been a Huss. And here, too, the Cross, from which flows the best of all lessons, is an eternal witness: if it tells of anguish, it tells also of victory, if it is a symbol of torture, it is no less a prophecy of triumph. The Jew hated it, the Greek scorned it, the Roman shuddered at it; Emperors treated the faith in it as a crime, and Philosophers as an insanity; and the hands that first upheld it were those only of the poor and the persecuted, the unlearned and the ignorant. Yet has it not won the victory? Has it not justified the promise "In this thou shalt conquer," which shone round it in the vision of Constantine? Is it not woven now on the banners of armies? Is it not set in gems on the diadem of emperors? Does it not—after nineteen rolling centuries—on the very topmost summit of the dome of this Cathedral in which we are gathered—does it not, in peaceful triumph and holy testimony, gleam over the greatest of earthly cities? And why? because, when read by the light of human history the words of Gamaliel were based on the deepest of human experiences, and he was right in warning the angry Sanhedrin, "If this counsel, or this work, be of men it shall come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God." Finally, then, may we not

learn from this text, both for our opinions and for our actions, the two great lessons of steadfastness and hope; knowing that for a time we may fail and suffer if we work the work of God, but such labour and such suffering must be ultimately blessed? And these are great lessons—for without hope life is miserable, and without effort it is dead. If there be any, indeed, so little worthy of their calling as Christians, of their dignity as men that they ask, "What good will it do *me* if I do not live to see the fruit of my labours"; if a man cares only to succeed now, and succeed at once—if he has not got above the low conception that his life is given him only to please himself—then, not only is the best not in him, but he will be a positive source of evil and of ruin. Not only will his own work be consumed as worthless stubble, but worse than this, his selfishness will discourage others, his sensuality corrupt others, his sloth clog others, his baseness will render others base. But, if we know that we are not our own, that we neither live nor die to ourselves, that we are not here to do our own will, or seek our own pleasure, or think our own thoughts, but, as far as we can, to leave the world better and happier than we found it, and to serve God our Father by loving and serving our brother man—if in this service we are content to suffer, and have faith that, in the end, we cannot fail—then we shall at least have lived the very highest life that is possible for man. For that highest life is to love duty more than success, and to rank service higher than reward, and to fight our hardest in the battle, without knowing whether we shall see victory. And this will not merely *lead* to happiness, but it is happiness: it will not merely cheer us with the hope of Heaven hereafter, but it is a foretaste of Heaven now.

Gamaliel, the Neutral

BY REV. B. J. GIBBON.

"Refrain from these men, and let them alone," &c.—Acts v. 38, 39.

Gamaliel, the speaker, does not improve upon acquaintance. On a first reading his advice sounds wise and good; but second thoughts qualify that favourable impression.

His advice, although it seems to breathe the spirit of a large-hearted tolerance, is really a piece of pure worldly wisdom. Gamaliel's object was not to serve truth, but to save his order. The Apostles had the support of the populace. Violent measures against them would be dangerous to the Sanhedrin. He would prevent the Council from shipwreck on that rock. So he preached temporary neutrality. If the Apostles were mere fanatics, all history showed that their misguided zeal would compass their destruction without interference from outside. If, on the other hand, they were *not* misguided zealots, the Council, if it did not take care, might find itself in the awkward predicament of fighting against God. "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone." But is that a praiseworthy attitude towards Christianity? It is at best calculating worldly prudence, or, in less polite terms, shuffling opportunism, sitting on the fence, waiting to see which way the wind will blow.

I. THE NEUTRAL POSITION WAS WRONG: THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN INVESTIGATION.

The Apostles who were on their trial claimed that Jesus Christ. Whom the Sanhedrin had crucified, had risen from the dead and ascended to Heaven, a Prince and a Saviour; that He had endowed them with Divine power to bear

effective witness to these truths; and that, through faith in His name, miracles were being wrought, and human lives renewed unto holiness daily. The Council knew the Apostles had a large following who believed these things. What, then, was their proper attitude, as the supreme religious assembly of the nation towards this popular movement in Jerusalem? To stand aside and see what would come of it? Surely not! but immediately to investigate it, and see whether they had made a terrible mistake in crucifying Jesus, as the Apostles averred, or whether those Apostles had concocted a gigantic tissue of frauds, and were deceiving the people. To evade that plain issue was cowardly. The policy of *laissez faire* was contemptible. Yet the president of the Council—for Gamaliel was such—could only advise that nothing should be done.

Now, multitudes to-day are practically in Gamaliel's position. On one side of the religious question are earnest Christians, like the Apostles; on the other, vehement gainsayers, like the Sanhedrin. But between these two wings is a large body of people who appear to belong to neither, but to be neutral, like Gamaliel. They shudder at the blasphemies of those who deny the Christians' Lord, and if they could would persecute His saints. They deplore the excesses of those who, if not atheistic in creed, lead lives that defy God's authority. Yet they do not identify themselves with the believers and the saints. They would say to persecutors—they do say to critics—"Refrain from these men, and let them alone": yet they do not join the men whose Lord is Jesus Christ.

But this attitude—the attempt at neutrality—is a wrong one. Jesus Christ presents Himself to us, and solicits investigation of His claims and decision upon them. "What think ye of Christ?" Either the centurion was right when he said, "Verily, this was the Son of God," or the Jews were right when they said, "He hath a devil, and is mad." Which? Either your friends who are trusting Him are woefully deceived, or they are supremely happy, and you should imitate them. Which? Come! Face the problem, and determine it. It was for this purpose supremely that reasoning powers and a will were given you. Do not sit feebly, procrastinatingly, contemptibly on the fence. Consider! Decide!

We have less excuse for neutrality than Gamaliel had. He had sufficient data to guide him to a right decision, but we have much more. The voice of time, to which he appealed, has spoken, and spoken emphatically, in favour of Jesus Christ. "This counsel or this work" has *not* "come to nought"; therefore, according to Gamaliel, it cannot be "of men." Two thousand years have passed, and Christianity is pre-eminent in the world. The most advanced nations profess belief in its principles; and the best men in every generation since have confessed their indebtedness to it. Yet you can only stand aside in pitiable indecision! It is a wrong position. The great question of Christ has been gathering momentum all these centuries, and to-day it presses upon us and refuses to be evaded. "What think ye of Christ?" Consider! Investigate! Decide!

II. THE NEUTRAL POSITION WAS ABSURD: THE SPEAKER WAS AN INTERESTED PARTY.

The Apostles had not scrupled to charge the members of the Sanhedrin, in their presence as well as behind their backs, with the murder of the Son of God. They had said, "Him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And, "Ye desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life." And on this very occasion, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." They asserted that the crucified Jesus had risen and ascended to God's Right Hand, and that it behoved His

murderers and all men to repent of their sins and cry for forgiveness through His name. Was it for the Sanhedrin, now that these men were before them, to say, "Let the matter rest!" and not rather to insist on its being cleared up?

Gamaliel's pose of philosophical detachment, of wise impartiality, of superior neutrality, is really too absurd. "Refrain from these men: . . . for if this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it." But "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" No! Gamaliel was a member of the Council which had passed the death sentence on Jesus Christ, and hounded Him past Pilate's judgment-seat to the Cross. Upon Gamaliel's garments, upon Gamaliel's hands, is blood, red blood, blood recently spilt; either innocent blood, in which case he is a murderer, or criminal blood, in which case he is guiltless, and has acted the part of a righteous judge. Does it not matter to him which? The Apostles are branding him and his associates throughout Jerusalem as shedders of innocent blood from envy—that is, murderers. Can he reasonably stand aside and loftily say, "It may be true; it may be untrue; time will tell"? It is absurd!

And, dear friends, our assumption of neutrality towards the religion of Jesus Christ is equally absurd. For it brands and blackens us all by declaring that we are sinners; it whispers immortal hope to us all by saying that Christ died for us; and it offers eternal joy to us all by the assurance that we are reconciled unto God by the death of His Son. But it declares also, in solemn tones, that we shall be heavily punished for our indifference and impenitence if we ignore its message. Shall we take up a neutral position, and say, "These things may be true, or they may not be true; we cannot trouble ourselves to find out: therefore, we refuse to commit ourselves either way"? That is palpably absurd. We are too deeply involved. The question for us rather is, "How shall we *escape* if we neglect so great salvation?"

III. THE NEUTRAL POSITION WAS DELUSIVE: THERE WAS REAL ANTAGONISM.

Gamaliel's profession of impartiality really covered a foregone conclusion that the Apostles could not possibly be in the right. Observe the dilemma he propounds: "If this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it." That is to say, "The question is, to oppose or not to oppose. Now, opposition is either needless, if it be of men, or useless, if it be of God: therefore let us not oppose." But *was* the question merely one of opposing Christianity or not doing so? Surely there remained a third possible course—to embrace it! Had Gamaliel entertained for one moment the contingency he raised for the purpose of argument—"if it be of God"—he would have mentioned that third possibility, of their being compelled by irresistible evidence to embrace it, and would have concluded by advising an impartial investigation. But the only courses that occurred to him were persecution or non-interference, because it was a settled thing in his mind that the Apostles were misguided fanatics. He did not mean seriously to suggest that they may be right, but was only balancing his argument when he said, ". . . if it be of God." For his conclusion was, Let it alone, "lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." But was the chief desire of the Sanhedrin, the religious council of the Jews, merely not "to fight against God"? Had they no wish to be found fighting, at the end of the day, on God's side? "If it be of God"—surely right reasoning would run—"it will become our duty to identify ourselves with it!" But Gamaliel did not suggest that, for he really did not seriously

contemplate the Apostles being right. His impartiality was apparent, not real : his professed neutrality was delusive, and covered real antagonism to the cause of Christ.

And the same is more or less true of all of us who will not decide to serve Christ. "He that is not for Me," said the Saviour, "is against Me." "He that believeth on the Son," says the New Testament, "hath eternal life ; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." And beyond these two it knows no other class.

It might easily be shown that intellectual neutrality towards the faith of Jesus really implies a verdict against it. There are many saying, "It may be true ; it may not be true. There is much to be said for it, and much against it. Really I cannot decide upon the evidence. I refuse to commit myself. I am neutral." But that person *does* commit himself ; he cannot help it : he is *not* neutral ; he cannot be. He virtually says that the evidence for Christianity is *not* sufficient to justify belief, and so arrays himself against believers.

In practical life, too, the assumption of neutrality often covers secret antagonism to pure and true religion. This man does not doubt that Jesus Christ came and died and rose again, and that He is the Saviour of the world. Why, then, does he not join His followers ? Because there is some hidden sin which, if he became a Christian, he would have to give up. Because he has formed some connection, or acquired some habit, inconsistent with the Christian profession. Because he is making money by unrighteous means. Because his worldly plans and his entire scheme of life would have to be altered if he acknowledged himself a Christian. Like the Sanhedrin, like Gamaliel, he has a vested interest in the other side ; and, therefore, although he professes to be neutral, he is really in opposition.

The Success of Christianity an Argument for its Divine Origin

BY REV. JOHN CAIRNS, D.D.

"Refrain from these men, and let them alone," &c.—Acts v. 38, 39.

These words of Gamaliel have experienced a fate somewhat singular, though not altogether unexampled. By one class they have been lauded as the very embodiment of deep and mature wisdom ; by another, they have been stigmatized as the utterance of a mean and time-serving selfishness, which waits till the fortune of parties is decided, and then casts in its lot with the strongest. I am inclined to think that both extremes are in error, and that Gamaliel does not deserve either the high praise or the unsparing censure which have been meted out to him. On the one hand, it did not require very great sagacity to see, that a work begun in circumstances like the Gospel of Christ could not withstand its adversaries long without Divine help ; and, on the other hand, there is no evidence that Gamaliel was merely waiting for the success of the Gospel to choose his side ; for he did not choose that side on which he might soon have seen that the strongest power was, but lived and died a Jew. The probability is that this eminent Rabbi was for the moment shaken in his own mind by the appearance of the Apostles, and by their miraculous deliverance. He therefore gave utterance to a sentiment very natural for one in these circumstances, when he urged upon others a policy of forbearance : and we may

even suppose that the same Spirit which overruled the words of Caiaphas presided over this good counsel of Gamaliel—a counsel the most favourable that could have been given for the infant Church. Whatever judgment we pass upon the character of Gamaliel, there can be but one opinion as to the soundness of his reasoning; and though it be a loftier instinct which anticipates the decisions of history, and chooses its side when great movements are in their infancy and weakness, those minds are not to be altogether despised which cling to historic proof, and prize the oracles of experience. The decision for which Gamaliel waited has long been given in favour of the Gospel; and it is my intention at this time, in dependence on Divine grace, to consider the success of Christianity as a proof of its Divine origin, and to urge home the conclusion that those who resist it fight against God.

I. LET ME ENDEAVOUR TO STATE AND ILLUSTRATE THE ARGUMENT FROM THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. It may be regarded, like all other evidences of the Gospel, as an argument from miracles or the presence of supernatural power. The arguments, from miracles in the strict sense, from prophecy, from the morality of the Gospel, from its adaptation to man, all involve an appeal to the supernatural. Here are certain undoubted facts. They cannot be accounted for without the immediate hand of God. Therefore God has been directly at work in them, and they are the seal of the Divinity of the religion in connection with which they appear.

1. The success of the Gospel has been wide and extensive. We do not rely on mere numbers; but this fact is one which cannot be overlooked. In the early ages the progress of the Gospel was so wide and general as to excite universal attention, both among friends and foes. To say nothing of the Jews who embraced it, many of the Gentiles who had previously become Jews changed their religion a second time, and owned Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ. There were many thousands, or “myriads,” of those who believed in Jerusalem. The faith of the Roman Church was spoken of throughout the whole world. Paul had preached the Gospel and made converts from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum; and his brother Apostles had been equally active, so that few countries of the known world remained without witnesses of the power of the Cross. When Nero began his persecution, about thirty years after our Lord's death, the Roman historian, Tacitus, tells that an “immense multitude” of the disciples of Jesus were either crucified or burned alive in Rome, whence we may have some idea of the number of Christians in that capital. Forty years later Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, states that in the distant province of Bithynia, of which he was governor, the heathen temples had been deserted, and the victims used in sacrifice had ceased to be purchased. By the end of the second century, the Christian writer, Tertullian, addressing the Roman magistrates, could use those words which have been so often quoted, “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled up every place: towns, islands, castles, boroughs, councils, camps, tribes, wards, palace, senate, forum; we have left you nothing but your temples.” In little more than three centuries, the Roman Empire became professedly Christian under Constantine; and all the efforts of his successor Julian could not avert the final and total downfall of Paganism. The wide diffusion of the Gospel, though in a corrupt form, did not cease. It was extended from Britain to China; and the foundation was laid of the present Christian nations of Europe, which have never since abjured the religion of the Cross. Though slowly, Christianity has been ever extending. It has become the religion of the New World, with hardly any exception; and the efforts of missions have, in recent times, given it a footing in parts of the earth the most

remote from one another, and renewed its early triumphs over Pagan and other errors. The spread and hold of the Gospel is thus a truly wonderful fact, when we consider its scanty beginnings and forlorn prospects. Even an unbeliever, who looks calmly at this astonishing fact, may well feel something of the mis-giving of Gamaliel creep over him, and may say, "If this religion be of God, we cannot overthrow it. It may turn out, after all, that we are fighting against God."

2. The success of the Gospel has been inward and radical. All experience shews how hard a thing it is to make men converts even to the mere outward forms of a new religion. It was said of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, under whom Christ was crucified, that he could not introduce a new word into the Latin tongue; and had he even attempted to introduce a new religion, he would undoubtedly have failed. We can judge of this matter from the widest experience; for we see what frightful sufferings have been in all ages endured, what wars have been waged, what mutinies have been stirred up from men's reluctance to change their religion. The words of the Prophet are unanswerably true to human nature, "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?" This reluctance was as great when the Gospel was first preached as it is now; and this was one stupendous difficulty in the way of its success. For it was not one nation only that was to change its religion, but all. The Jew had to give up his splendid ritual introduced by Moses, to forsake the temple with its sacrifices, to discontinue the Passover and other glorious memorials of deliverance, and to admit that a poor carpenter and his twelve humble attendants had better understood the Law and the Prophets than the Scribes and Pharisees, and rulers of Israel. The Greek had to renounce those rites which recalled the ancient glories of his race, when its founders mingled with gods and demi-gods; which had been exalted by poetry and beautified by art; and which had been intertwined with the whole framework of the national character. The Roman had to part with the whole fabric of those ceremonies which went back to Romulus and Numa, which had flourished with every advance of the world-subduing republic, and which, at length, in the deification of the emperor, had so combined national worship and loyalty as to make an attack upon religion treason against the majesty of Rome. A multitude of other nations clung with not less tenacity to the gods of their ancestors. The beast-worshippers of Egypt, the fire-worshippers of Persia, the Moloch-worshippers of Syria, the Druids of Gaul, and a host of other devotees of superstition, were assailed by the Gospel at one stroke; and wherever it went it provoked some such cry of angry defiance from a thousand violated shrines and altars as this: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We forget how much heathenism, even in its best state, was bound up, not only with the prejudices and interests of the body of the people, but with their darling lusts and vices; for it has been justly said, that much of the strength of these old religions lay in the uncleanness and drunkenness which they fostered, and even associated with Divine worship. What a stupendous change to sweep all this away, and to make men everywhere outwardly Christian, worshippers of one God, and observant of some of those decencies of life to which Paganism was one perpetual insult! Had the Gospel only done as much as this—to bring these heathen nations into the same state that Christian nations are in at this day, though not a single person had been regenerated, it would have been something not easy to explain without calling in the power of God. Yet this was not the half of what the Gospel did for vast multitudes then, and of what it has continued to do wherever its true power has been felt. To turn an idolater into a nominal Christian is only to bring him to the threshold

of the great change which the Gospel effects. The true miracle begins with making him a new creature in Christ Jesus; and this difficulty remained then, as it remains still, in dealing with the human heart. To bring the godless sinner back to God—to establish in the conscience not only a fear of hell, but a “consent unto the law that it is good”—to display in the crucified Nazarene, despised and rejected of men, One Who is seen to be the Father’s Messenger, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person—to prevail on the soul, so proud by nature, to receive Him as wisdom; so self-righteous by nature, to receive Him as righteousness; so wedded to sin by nature, to receive Him as sanctification—to induce it to take up the cross, to smile at martyrdom, and to vanquish the fear of death—this is an achievement altogether and utterly beyond human strength; and when we see this so common in the primitive Church—when we see this character produced everywhere—a new thing in the earth—the same among the polished Greeks and the wandering Scythians, among the dwellers in Rome and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, among masters and slaves, among Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—we are constrained to exclaim “This is the finger of God!” “The hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.” This was the wonder—the true phenomenon—in the success of Christianity: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins!”

3. The success of the Gospel of Christ is a success prolonged and renewed. When Gamaliel compared the Gospel to the movements in the days of Theudas, or of Judas of Galilee, he was quite in order. It grates upon our ears; but had the cause of Christ been no more Divine than theirs, it would, after some noise and commotion, have as speedily died away. There is something, when we reflect upon it, very impressive in the vitality of genuine Christianity. It has often been dying, but it is not yet dead. Everywhere it puts forth the same flowers—zeal for God, love to Christ, pity for perishing men; and thus a spectacle altogether unequalled is exhibited; for while the systems of human opinion, being grounded in the human mind, die and revive again, no religion professing to come from God as the Gospel does has ever died and been resuscitated; but when once it has waned, it has gone out in darkness, and can no more be re-kindled than an exhausted torch, or a star fallen from heaven. The self-renewing power of the Gospel exceeds all fable. The converts of Polynesia, Ceylon, Burmah, Madagascar, speak all one tongue, and exalt one name which is above every name. Christianity has returned to the old seats of revelation, to Ur of the Chaldees, to Shechem, to Nazareth, to Bethlehem. It converts the house of Voltaire into a Bible depository, and the palace of Frederick the Great into a meeting-place of Christian union. Here is the presence of a God that judgeth in the earth, and that God on the side of His own Word and His own Son, for Whom He is thus accomplishing His own promise: “Sit Thou at My Right Hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool!” May we see, then, this sign of a Divine power encamping round about the Gospel of Christ! And may we, with kings and judges of the earth, be wise, and be taught to kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and we perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little, since they alone are blessed that put their trust in Him!

II. Having thus endeavoured to state and illustrate the argument from the success of Christianity in support of its Divine origin, I SHALL BRIEFLY NOTICE SOME OBJECTIONS TO ITS FORCE, which, however, one and all, turn out in its favour, and strengthen its validity.

1. It is objected that false religions have had great success in the world; so that the argument proves too much, and thus nothing in favour of the Gospel.

Not to mention the various systems of idolatry, there is the delusion of the Arabian Prophet of the East, which spread over a very wide circle with great rapidity, and even expelled Christianity from its ancient territories. But to this instance Christian writers have always given replies which are perfectly conclusive. The spread of Mohammedanism, though extensive, has been far more limited than that of Christianity. It has always been, and is to this day, an Eastern religion. Again, it has had no inward or radical success. Let it be granted that it set up the unity of God, and maintained some excellent moral lessons, it had in its bosom no doctrine of regeneration, no strict and unworldly discipline, no Heaven of purity and spiritual blessedness for which all was to be renounced: and, above all, it did not carry on its front an amazing claim, like that of a humble crucified Jew, to call Himself the Son and equal of God, and to make His death the world's hope, and His Resurrection the starting-point of a new life to the nations. The success of a religion which claimed and attempted so little is not wonderful. In fact, take a Mohammedan, a Jew, and a nominal Christian, and it is comparatively easy to change any one of them into the other. It is only when you try to make any of them a new creature in Christ Jesus that the difficulty begins. But anything like this the religion of Mohammed has never attempted, far less achieved; and, therefore, its success is as little parallel to that of Christianity as the success of a man who could mould pieces of tough clay into different human shapes, would be parallel to that of a man who could endow these shapes with true life. And, once more, the success of this false religion has not been prolonged and renewed like that of the Gospel. It lies at this day effete and helpless, not only unable to heal the "sickness" of the nations that embrace it, but itself their true disease, which they must shake off before they can have any promise either for the life that now is, or for that which is to come. All this would have been true, and, I think, unanswerable, even had this false system, like the Gospel of Christ, been introduced on its own merits, and supported by persuasion and argument. But, as we all know, it was propagated at the point of the sword. "Death or the Koran" has always been its best-loved motto; and we see this hateful spirit in recent massacres. Christianity conquered by suffering death; this bastard religion by inflicting it. With the one, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church; with the other, the blood of unbelievers. It is not creditable to the candour of any who dilate on the success of Mohammedanism while overlooking this peculiar feature. It would be as logical to trace the conquests of Attila or Timour to a Divine mission, or to measure the degree in which the pirate or highway robber stood high in the favour of Heaven by the amount of his plunder. How different with the Gospel of Christ, which has always owed its best victories to the power of truth and to the spirit of kindness! These were the sling and the stone with which it entered the lists against the Goliath of ancient Paganism, armed with all the weapons of the flesh. We may truly say, that had it not been of God, its few poor and feeble adherents could not have resisted the shock for a single moment. There is nothing like this victory in the whole history of the world; and nothing can account for it but the sublime figure of the Word of God itself, which tells us that the Stone cut without hands out of the mountain smote the image and scattered it to the winds, because the God of Heaven was then setting up a Kingdom which should never be destroyed.

2. It is objected to the argument drawn from the success of Christianity, that it has not been universal. Many are staggered by the slow progress of the Gospel, and by the fact that it is not yet the religion of the majority of the

human race. Had all men become Christians, it is urged, we would have acknowledged the finger of God ; but the Jews remain unconverted, and vast masses of the Gentiles have never yet heard the Saviour's name. This difficulty, I think, admits of a complete answer. Consider how it limits the power of God. Upon this supposition He cannot reveal Himself to one or many without revealing Himself to all. What should we have thought if, when our Saviour healed the man born blind, and he exclaimed, " One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," there had been another person unhealed, and he had immediately objected, " It cannot be, since I am still blind " ? When our Lord wrought no mighty works in Capernaum, it was no proof that He had not wrought them elsewhere. And so with the limitation in the effects of the Gospel. Even one true conversion is a superhuman result, and much more a multitude of such conversions ; and all that we are warranted to infer from the partial nature of the result is, that the Divine Author of the Gospel has, for reasons known to Himself, not chosen everywhere to exert the same power. To hold that God must work at the full stretch of Omnipotence before we can know that it is God, is the same absurdity as to hold that a man must speak at the full pitch of his voice before he can be recognised. Let a surprising cure take effect on fifty, and it is no objection that it has not yet been tried upon a hundred. It will be time to condemn it when it has been equally tried on them, and failed. We must plainly know what God's intentions were before we find fault with the partial success of the Gospel. If He meant to punish the wilful rejection of His own gift, this will sufficiently explain the non-conversion of the Jews ; if He meant to leave room for human co-operation, this will explain the slow progress of the Gospel in professedly Christian nations ; if He judged it better to proceed by degrees than at one sweeping stroke, this will obviate a host of difficulties connected with the gradual and interrupted march of Christianity. The work is still Godlike, as far as it goes ; and to ask more ere we believe, would be the same kind of error as for an Israelite to have demanded the dispersion of all the darkness of Egypt before he could admit that the children of Israel had preternatural light in their dwellings. When are we to be satisfied ? Suppose that the whole world was converted but one man, this objection would still hold good ; nay, that solitary unbeliever could stand up and make the whole truth of God of none effect ! It is enough that we see a power at work which has converted many, and which is able to convert all. For this conclusion every candid mind has long had ample evidence ; and, therefore, we may well say, even of the imperfect acceptance of Christ as the head of the corner, though we see not yet all things put under Him, " It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ! "

3. The only other objection which I shall notice to the success of the Gospel, and the argument from it, is, that this success has been less with those who profess to be influenced by the Gospel than might have been expected from a Divine religion. Granted, it may be said, that all, or the majority, are not called into the Christian Church, it might have been anticipated, that those who are would be wrought upon more effectually, if the worker were God. What evils have been associated with the Christian name, what scandals, what inconsistencies ! Is there, after all, so much of God here ? I trust I have not understated this objection, which is one that every Christian must be prepared to meet ; and yet I am thoroughly convinced that it is untenable. We must first of all separate between nominal and genuine Christians. The distinction exists among Christians alone ; for no other religion is spiritual enough to allow of this division. Is the true Church, then, to blame for its nominal adherents

and their evils? If it testify against them by doctrine and discipline, what more can it do? Is it responsible for the assumption of its name, which it cannot hinder, and for all the wars, cruelties, abuses, perpetrated under that name? Nay, is not the tribute to its own light and truth and goodness all the greater that men not truly connected with it embrace some part of its creed, and practise some portion of its morality, and seek to cloak even their vices under its venerable sanction? It is among true Christians—the Church within the Church—that the true effects of Christianity are to be seen; and here we fearlessly join issue with objectors. It is not denied that there are sins and falls and inconsistencies even here. But these are not tolerated by others; these are confessed by the offenders with grief and shame. If there be sin, there is also repentance, and a struggle to live unto God. The Gospel does not profess to realise its highest perfection in this life, but to crucify the flesh by a slow and painful process. It is enough if this process be going on; if the beginning of a new and heavenly life be seen; and if the spirit lust against the flesh as truly as the flesh lusts against the spirit. Now this, we contend, is found in the experience of all true Christians, and in them alone; and this, we maintain, gives the Gospel a Divine seal and sanction, which all the defective qualities of the wax on which it is impressed cannot annul. There is in the true Christian Church a reverence for God, a fear of offending Him, a grief for having offended Him, which is found nowhere else. There is a genuine cordial love to Him, and a deep grateful sense of His unspeakable gift, unknown in those systems which, in some sort, confess the Father, but deny the Son. There is a spirit of prayer and devotion, and an unfeigned longing after God, as peculiar as the office of the Son and the Spirit, whereby the Christian draws nigh to Him. There is a superiority to this world, and a serious regard to the world to come, which finds nowhere any sympathy beyond its own pale. And there is withal a courage, a truthfulness, and an affection in meeting life's claims, and a fortitude in bearing its trials, together with a prevailing calmness in facing the last trial of all, which are taught in no other school.

III. I SHALL CLOSE BY BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATING SOME INFERENCES WHICH FOLLOW FROM THE SUCCESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

1. The success of Christianity is a tribute to the glory of the Saviour. If it failed, He would not reign; for He was exalted to promote it. If it failed, He would have died in vain; for He died to gather into one the children of God that are scattered abroad. As it is, every onward step of the Gospel is like a step in some solemn piece of martial music which sounds His praise. Every conversion is a trophy to His invincibility. Every land added to His sway is another crown placed upon His head. And the final conquest of the world will awake the final peal of the anthem to His glory: "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

2. The success of the Gospel is a source of confidence to the Church. Christianity—we may say it boldly—can never be in such danger again, as it has already triumphed over. Had it been of man, it had long ago come to nought. Its enemies have assailed it with every possible weapon, and searched every rivet of its armour. Innumerable edicts have gone forth against it, and recoiled on their authors. Works without end have been written to confute it, and perished. Discoveries in long array have been brought forth to silence it, and have themselves fallen into silence. Sneers and mockeries have been multiplied against it, as it seemed to hang upon the Cross; and they have withered away as the garland of thorn from the risen Saviour. It moves a smile of pity when this hero or the other comes forth against the Word or Gospel of God, forgetful

of the hosts that have sunk already in the attempt, like insects rushing against the flame, or birds of night glaring defiance at the sun. The cause of truth has risen to such dignity of age, that it can now afford to answer such assailants "never a word." Difficulties for a time may perplex the more candid inquiry on points of history and science; but these melt away with growing light, and the works and Word of God shine out in fairer harmony. Meanwhile the Gospel holds on its own sublime path. While its enemies are labouring to make the stars fight against it, it is moving a power above the stars, it is seeking by prayer to Him that made the seven stars and Orion, and scattering blessings on the nations, whereby the shadow of death is turned into the morning. While they are digging among extinct creations, and vainly bringing forth the wreck of beasts and fishes in its disproof, it is creating new races and peoples, and excavating immortal souls out of the horrible pit and miry clay, to show forth, God's praise. For such a religion to perish would be to suppose a world without God, man without a soul, and life without an immortality. Some there may be—we fear there are—who would welcome these conclusions, so as to extinguish the Gospel in the common darkness; but the God of Heaven and earth will not abdicate in their favour, or suffer the night to fall. Light is sown for the righteous, and when all its haters are brought to confusion, those who have hailed its dawn shall triumph in its day!

3. The success of the Gospel is a motive of conversion to the unbeliever. There is nothing so mournful as to be at once on the wrong, and on the losing side. To perish in a good cause surrounds the name with glory; but where is the wisdom, where is the magnanimity, where is the honour, of dying a martyr to error, to folly, to sin and wickedness? This is not to be a hero, but a traitor; not to be a sacrifice, but a suicide! What an infamous war, to fight against God! and what a disastrous end, to be broken as with a rod of iron, and dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel! It will not add to God's glory, in the highest sense, to destroy you; for what power need He display in overcoming such worms of the dust as you? But it will add to His honour to spare and forgive you; since your utter feebleness and helplessness will then illustrate the clemency of His government. This is what He seeks. This is what He offers. Oh! be prevailed upon to accept His overtures made through the blood of His Son; for then His Omnipotence shall be your safeguard, and not your terror; and the perpetuity of this Gospel, with all its saving blessings, shall be the very charter and security of your eternal life!

Toleration

BY REV. NICHOLAS T. GARRY, M.A.

"Refrain from these men," &c.—Acts v. 38, 39.

These are words grave and important, whether we think of the place in which they were spoken; of the person whose advice they contain; of the occasion which gave them birth; or of the results to which they led.

They were spoken in the Sanhedrin, the Ecclesiastical Council of Israel, dating as some writers say, from those seventy elders whom Moses gathered around him, by the advice of his father-in-law, lest the burden of the people should prove too great for him: and at any rate, a council even in its later days, of power and influence enough to summon before it, Herod when procurator of Galilee.

They were spoken by Gamaliel, its president, the son of Symeon, whom tradition identifies with the old man who received the Infant Saviour in his arms, and then sang his "Nunc dimittis," and the grandson of the famous Hillel; by Gamaliel, one of the seven doctors of the law to whom alone the Jews gave the title of "Rabban," denoting special honour and authority. They were spoken at the very crisis and turning point of the Christian faith, when it was first emerging out of the obscurity of its origin, beginning to exert an influence on the mind and thought of the ancient people of God, and consequently to make a stir and to excite opposition. The Apostles themselves, the first preachers of the new way, were the accused upon whose case the Sanhedrin was deliberating; and, humanly speaking, it is not too much to say that to the wise and temperate counsel of the president they owed their lives and were let go, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of their Lord and Master and firmly resolved daily in the Temple and in every house, to teach and to preach Jesus Christ. But the words are grave and important in themselves. It is the fashion to depreciate them; in many of the commentaries you will find them called words of mere worldly prudence, and of timid caution, words that embody the *laissez aller* principle of incompetent rulers, the mere fatalism of men that will not rouse themselves to action.

Let us examine them a little closer and see whether they deserve all the depreciation that has been so diligently heaped upon them; let us see what was the exact circumstance of the case, and remembering it, let us reflect whether any words could be devised more skilfully adapted to sway the minds of the councillors, to turn the Sanhedrin from the deadly purpose which it had conceived and to save the lives of the twelve men who were standing as prisoners before it. Some writers have supposed that Gamaliel was already a Christian, but like Nicodemus, secretly, for fear of the Jews; concealing his new belief in the depths of his own mind, lest he should be put out of the council; and resolved to retain his seat for a time, that he might be the better able to protect those followers of the crucified Nazarene, Whom he already confessed as his Lord and his God. This may be so; but it seems far more natural to adopt the old tradition of the Church; and to say that Gamaliel was still in a period of transition, that he had not as yet made up his mind about the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah; and that it was not until some years afterwards that he was brought to a full knowledge of the truth, by his own distinguished and favourite pupil, St. Paul. If this be so, his words are the exact expression of the state of his mind; he wished for longer time to balance probabilities; he wished to commit his decision to the issue of the event; in this mind he took his seat that day in the presidential chair, and listened to the trial and to the defence of the accused made by St. Peter, as their spokesman. The speech which we are considering is evidently his summing up of the whole case, and the setting forth of the reasons for his intended vote on the side of mercy; he first reminded the council of two of the many instances by which, in those days of popular discontent and uneasy excitement, the peace of Judæa was so often disturbed; he spoke of Judas of Galilee, and of Theudas, both of whose names still burnt in the ears of his hearers, and whose deeds had no doubt given them, as the spiritual rulers of the people, much trouble and anxiety; he asked what has become of them; they perished with their followers, they are now but a memory and a name; we know that their cause was not the cause of God, because it has come to nothing; we know that they acted of themselves, the issue of the event has given us the proof. He does not directly compare Jesus of Nazareth to Theudas and Judas of Galilee (and it is this that has caused some writers

to think that he was already, in heart, a Christian), but he leaves the inference to be drawn ; the inference plainly is, Jesus died, as those men died ; perished as you might say in His insurrection ; but His followers say that He is alive again ; and that they worship Him as their Prince and Saviour : it may be so, it may not ; He may be still lying in His grave ; or He may have risen from the dead, and be in very truth the Messiah for whom we are taught to look ; let us leave time to decide in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, as it has already decided in that of Theudas and Judas ; let us leave these followers of Jesus alone ; if their cause be of men it will come to nought, and will pass away, leaving but a memory and a name behind ; if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it. Leave them alone ; if they are acting of themselves they are not worth your trouble, they and their cause alike will come to nought ; if they are really acting as the instruments of God, all your trouble will be thrown away, you will find yourselves fighting, not against these men, but against God, Who, in that case, is acting on the world through them. It is too soon to decide as yet ; let us leave the decision to the verdict of the years as they pass. What wisdom can be greater, what faith can be nobler than that in which Gamaliel spoke ? The words are indeed worthy of the occasion, and were well suited to the audience ; so well that, as we know, they gained their end ; they changed the minds of the councillors, and saved the lives of the Apostles.

But leaving the details and the results of this particular instance, let us examine what is the general principle laid down in the words under our notice. It is a principle well known to Englishmen, we call it *toleration* ; it results in the civil and religious liberty which is the proudest boast of the Anglo Saxon race, the peculiar characteristic of religion amongst us. Toleration is not, as our enemies would tell us, an indifference to the truth, but it rests upon two graces of the Holy Ghost, perhaps the most precious of all, *Humility* and *Faith*. The principle of toleration is a confession by men, that they do not claim to give infallible definitions of the Truth ; that the Truth of God is broad and deep enough to present many different appearances ; that its aspect depends very much upon our own standing ground, and that it may appear in a different light to others in another place. Those who profess toleration are too *humble* to fancy that they know all the truth ; and so when any new religious movement arises, they do not hasten to condemn it, they do not presume to decide in a moment whether it be of God or of men, they refrain from those who belong to it, and they let them alone. But now comes in the other grace, the gift of *Faith* ; the Christian knows Whom he has believed : and he is persuaded that God is able to protect His truth against the day of trial. Toleration merely transfers the decision from man to God ; owning that man may often be mistaken, it refers the verdict to God, feeling sure that He worketh in the silent working of the years ; that however much the people may rage, however vain things they may imagine, He sitteth above the water-floods of human thought and remaineth a King for ever over the affairs of mankind ; feeling sure that the truth must conquer, because God is Truth as well as Love. Those who are tolerant can wait the issue without disquiet ; they calmly watch the passing away of time, and the downfall of the little systems of error, one by one, not by the arm of man, but by the surer, though slower, working of the arm of God. Knowing that the truth must conquer, they tarry the Lord's leisure, and leave the vindication of the truth to Him Who is the Truth itself. These words of Gamaliel contain the twofold principle on which religious toleration rests : distrust of the judgment of man ; confidence in the judgment of God.

It is interesting to note by whom religious toleration was first preached. Remember that Gamaliel was the Tutor of St. Paul. We may be sure that the mind of so great a man must have wonderfully influenced the minds of those who, as pupils, sat at his feet. The mantle of Gamaliel fell upon St. Paul. St. Paul may perhaps have listened to these very words of his great master; the seed sown fell deep into his heart, and at length germinated and bore fruit; and he stands before us as the largest hearted and most tolerant of all the first preachers of Christianity; as the first Jew who was able, thoroughly, to overleap the barriers and prejudices of his education; to break down the middle wall of partition, and to preach a Gospel common to a Jew and Gentile alike. Is it too much to trace in the religious history of the English Church the silent and large-hearted influence of him from whom she traces her spiritual descent; is it not more than fancy that detects in each of the three great bodies into which the Catholic Church has been divided, the mind and spirit of that Apostle with which each was the most closely connected? The changeless East still reflects the rapt, enthusiastic, and unchanging love of St. John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, who, in his later days at Ephesus, did so much to win over to Christianity the natives of those parts, and who, with his dying breath, said, "Little children, love one another." The Roman Church, in her stern, severe, and impetuous intolerance, reminds us of the stern, severe, and impetuous spirit of him to whom her central Church is dedicated, and whom she claims as the Rock on which she rests. We know her power; we dread her advances; we admire the many influences by which she enthralls the minds of men; but we know that within her pale there is the desolating absence of all thought; that her children are like men living in a place whence the air has been all but exhausted, that they are gasping for breath, and must, in the end, make their escape or perish: by repressing thought, Rome has made a solitude, and she calls it the Peace of God; she tells us that order reigns within her walls, as it reigns nowhere else; it may be so, the dead in their graves rest quietly enough, and raise no revolt, or opposing cry; her system has fossilised religion, has petrified and turned to stone all human thought; she has followed the stern, severe side of the character of the Apostle whom she calls her founder, and has forgotten the tender and more genial aspect of his disposition. The Eastern Church in her changeless love reminds us of St. John, the Apostle of ceaseless love; the Roman Church, in her proud exclusiveness, tells us of him who would not eat with the Gentile Christians when certain came from James, but separated himself, keeping aloof from them, lest he should be defiled. Does not the English Church in her large-hearted tolerance, in her skilful combination of different systems of thought into one homogeneous whole, remind us of the Apostle who withstood Peter to the face, and blamed his intolerance, and who was enabled by God to bring into the one Body, both Jew and Gentile, of twain making in Christ Jesus one New Man, so making peace, and setting up on the earth the one Fold of the one Shepherd? The peculiar characteristic of our part of the Catholic Church is toleration and large-hearted sympathy, the characteristic of St. Paul.

The Agreement of Science and Religion

BY REV. P. M'ADAM MUIR, D.D.

"Refrain from these men," &c.—Acts v. 38, 39.

There may be difference of opinion as to the attitude of Gamaliel towards Christianity, as to the motives by which he was actuated, as to whether he had any adequate comprehension of the faith which he was willing to tolerate. There can be no difference of opinion as to the wisdom and rightness of the advice in itself.

Many a sad page of history would have been unwritten had the advice been more generally followed, not only by unbelievers in Christianity, but by teachers and leaders of the Christian Church. Men are slow to learn that the most obstinate rejection of a truth will not turn the truth into a falsehood—that it remains a truth, whether they admit it or not—and that if it is truth, it must sooner or later win its way. The Eastern devotee whose religion forbade him to take the life of any creature, large or small, and who, on looking through a microscope, discovered that all unconsciously he was daily taking the life of innumerable beings, and dashed the microscope to pieces under the impression that his religion would be thus preserved unimpaired, did not alter the fact. Whether or not he chose to look, whether or not that microscope, or indeed every microscope on earth was shattered, the life of which he had caught so wonderful and so unwelcome a glimpse did not cease to be, and his assurance of his own innocuousness was founded on a delusion. Truth is truth, and cannot be destroyed, though its progress may be indefinitely retarded. "History," according to John Stuart Mill, "teems with instances of truth put down by persecution," and he calls it "idle sentimentality" to suppose that "truth merely as truth has any inherent power denied to error of prevailing against the dungeon and the stake." We must not confound between success and right, between general acceptance of a belief and the certainty of its correctness. But however suppressed or checked, it cannot be annihilated; in the fact that we recognise it as a truth we have an evidence that persecution did not effectually put it down.

Truth crushed to earth shall rise again;
 The eternal years of God are hers:
 But error, vanquished, writhes in pain,
 And dies amid his worshippers.

Truth, even though it never re-appeared, even though nobody professed adherence to it, would not be changed. Seen or unseen, accepted or rejected, it endures; not to be destroyed by simply refusing to believe in it; above all, not to be destroyed by imprisoning or torturing or excommunicating or killing its advocates.

The efforts made to stop the advance of Science have been futile. Step by step she has fought her way, remaining not only true in herself, but eventually compelling her claims to be acknowledged where they had been most bitterly derided. Science has had her warfare and her martyrs. In nearly all her departments she has been denounced, and her preachers have been assailed and persecuted. Discovery after discovery has been hailed with hatred and with horror, has been declared to be incompatible with belief in God and with the attainment of salvation. A review of the progress of the centuries and of the manner in which the progress has been impeded, might almost prompt the question, "Which of the prophets of physical science did not your fathers persecute?"

The announcement that the earth went round the sun sent a shock of consternation throughout Christendom. It was a contradiction of the letter of Scripture and of the doctrine of the Church. The aged man who propounded the theory was dragged before an ecclesiastical tribunal, and was obliged, on his knees, to "abjure, curse and detest the error and the heresy of the movement of the earth." After his death, his remains were refused admittance to the tomb of his family, and a monument to his memory was forbidden, because, in the judgment of Church authorities, "it would be an evil example for the world if such honours were rendered to a man who had been condemned for

an opinion so false, who had communicated it to many others, and who had given so great a scandal to Christendom." But that decision did not affect, in the smallest degree, the fact which Galileo proclaimed, and the earth did not in consequence cease to move.

The discoveries and experiments of Roger Bacon were full of untold benefit to mankind: but he was regarded with suspicion, he was stigmatised as a Mahometan and an atheist, as in league with the devil: his books were burned, his instruments were broken, he was thrust into prison and treated with barbarous cruelty: his name was so feared and detested that Religious Orders were forbidden to study natural philosophy and chemistry, lest they should imbibe his errors: so it is no wonder that, worn-out and weary, he should murmur at the last, "Would that I had not given myself so much trouble for the love of Science."

It is hardly credible, though it is unfortunately true, that the use of a winnowing machine was solemnly anathematised as an invention of Satan, and as an impious defiance of the text, "The wind bloweth where it listeth"; or that the use of chloroform should have been resisted as a presumptuous attempt to evade a divinely-pronounced primeval curse.

It is within living memory that geology was regarded as a black art; that interference with the current notions as to the age of the earth, the antiquity of man, the universality of the deluge, the creation of the world in six literal days, was considered as a rejection of vital doctrines of the Gospel of Christ; or that the theories which are identified with the now honoured name of Darwin, and on which, whether we accept them or reject them, we can now look with equanimity, were pronounced in many pulpits to be absolutely inconsistent with all religion and all morality.

It must in fairness be remembered that although there was no excuse for the persecution and the violence of indiscriminate vituperation, there was often excuse for timidity and for unbelief. Science itself teaches us to be slow in accepting hypotheses till they are proved. Everything novel is not of necessity true. The adoption of theories which apparently involve momentous issues, and the renunciation of beliefs which are associated, however accidentally and mistakenly, with the holiest memories and the loftiest aspirations, cannot be expected to take place without a painful struggle. It must also, in fairness, be remembered that the opposition to scientific discovery is not to be attributed to the Church or to Christianity. It is begging the question to talk of "the conflict of Science with Religion"; it is scarcely quite accurate to speak even of the conflict of Science with Theology. "When we look beneath the surface of things," says the late Dr. John Fiske, "we see that in reality there has never been any conflict between Religion and Science. . . . The real historical conflict which has been thus curiously misnamed has been the conflict between the more crude opinions belonging to the Science of an earlier age, and the less crude opinions belonging to the Science of a later age." The conflict, in other words, has been only with certain representatives of Religion, with certain schools of Theology. Religion as Religion, Theology as Theology, must not be considered hostile. It is not the conflict of Science with Religion, it is scarcely even the conflict of Science with Theology, that we have to lament; it is the conflict of Science with Science. Ecclesiastics were to blame quite as much for adhering to a Science which was outgrown, as for adhering to a Religion which was discredited, and a Theology which was exploded. They were to blame for imagining that the Infinite could be contained not only within the Heaven of Heavens, but within the limits which the eye of man could see and the intellect of man could

grasp ; they were to blame for seeking to imprison the Eternal Spirit in a transitory form, for refusing to believe that any light could be beyond the range of their own narrow vision, for thus encouraging the idea which the author of the able and elaborate history of "The Warfare of Science with Theology" has termed "the most mistaken of all mistaken ideas," "that Religion and Science are enemies."

Hence the needlessness, as well as the futility, of sundry so-called schemes of reconciliation. Attempts to make the simple words of the Bible speak in the technical terms of Science, as well as attempts to refute Science on account of supposed discrepancy with phrases of the Bible, are doomed to failure. Physical things may be physically discerned, and spiritual things may be spiritually discerned, but the one is not a contradiction of the other. What is true in the one cannot be in real collision with what is true in the other ; though, it may be the time for clearly seeing their unity has not yet come, and may even be far distant. There cannot be two sets of truths in diametrical and irreconcilable antagonism to each other. Truth is truth, in whatever sphere it is found, be it scientific, be it religious. The scientific spirit cannot be opposed to truth of any kind ; would forfeit its right to be called scientific if it condemned, without patient inquiry, truth of any kind. To religious error, as to every error, it must be opposed, to religious truth, as to every truth, it must be friendly. To the religious spirit, the laws of nature must be laws of God—to reject them would be to be found fighting against Him—it is His will, His mind, that we discern in their changeless stability, in their endless unfolding. "Truth secular," so wrote Sir David Brewster, "cannot be separated from truth Divine. . . . If the God of Love is most appropriately worshipped in the Christian Temple, the God of Nature may be equally honoured in the Temple of Science. Even from its lofty minarets the philosopher may summon the faithful to prayer and the priest and the sage may exchange altars without the compromise of Faith or of Knowledge."

In no half-hearted manner may we this day give thanks to God for the progress of Science. Its triumph may, beyond all else, stir the mind to reverence and adoration. Its material benefits are not to be under-valued. In a great commercial city like this, with its manufactures, its industries, its shipping, its University and colleges and schools, hospitals and infirmaries, with its record of great inventions, and its prospect of ever-developing resources, we have continual evidence that, through the ministrations of Science, happiness is increased. the burden of toil is lightened, and pain and misery are alleviated.

But we can claim for Science that not only has it done much for material well-being, it has done something for religion, it has helped to remove degrading conceptions of the Divine : it has given us more reason than ever to worship and adore, it has fulfilled the contention of Sir John Herschell, that its students should be as messengers from Heaven to earth, whose proud prerogative is to search out, not only those secrets of nature which shall increase the wealth or power of man, but to declare truths which "by dilating the intellect react on the moral character of mankind." The cause of pure religion has not suffered, but profited by the triumphs of Science. The Science which is truly Science must, to the devout soul, be a revelation of God, a gift from the Father of Lights with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Each successive discovery is but an opening of our eyes to behold wondrous things out of His law. With Science as her guide, Theology can only see in the most startling results of the boldest investigations new manifestations of the Eternal Word. The marvels of the universe are felt more keenly by the enlightened than by

the ignorant. Not he to whom the stars are but little twinkling points not far above our heads, shining solely for our benefit, but he who knows them to be worlds larger than our own, and to be infinitely more numerous than the unaided vision has detected, can most intelligently, most reverently, say with the Psalmist, "When I consider Thy heavens, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" "For my own part," said the late saintly Bishop of Durham, "I must confess that physical science appears to be the most magnificent illustration of that faith which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sets before us as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'" Now, as never before, we have impressed upon us a sense of the unity of creation and the solidarity of man: a conviction that no region of the universe is undivine, that the presence of God is to be found as much in the daily and ordinary occurrences of life as in the strange and the exceptional, and a confidence that there is one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all and in all.

He in His Science plans
 What no known laws foretell:
 The wandering fires and fixed
 Alike are miracle:
 The common death of all,
 The life renewed above,
 Are both within the scheme
 Of that all-circling love.

Whatever changes may have taken place in the religious teachings of the last fifty or seventy years, they have but emphasised the only Scriptural definitions of Him in Whom we live and move and have our being—God is Spirit, God is Light, God is Love. They have but emphasised the assurance that for the fullest knowledge of the mind of God which the mind of man is capable of conceiving, we must look to Him Who was lifted up upon the Cross, and Who said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." And the reasonable conclusion of all investigation would seem to be identical with the rapturous conclusion of devotion: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out; of Him and through Him and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory for ever.

Thus it is right and fitting that on a day like this we should, within these sacred walls, give praise and thanks for the victories which Science has won in enlarging the boundaries of knowledge, in providing means for the promotion of social well-being, in disclosing realm upon realm of unsuspected mystery. In more than sixty churches to-day throughout this city welcome will be given to the great Association which has achieved so much for the advancement of Science during its career of more than three-score years and ten, and in not one of these Churches, we may be sure, will a discordant note be struck. The work which the British Association has to do will everywhere be hailed as in thorough harmony with the work which the Church of Christ has to do. The earnest Christian and the ardent seeker after truth must be fellow-workers, though their lot be cast in different spheres of the Kingdom of God.

It may be that in the future new and startling discoveries await us. The experience of the past will surely teach us to possess our souls in patience, to refrain from hasty condemnation, to be assured that the discoveries, when our dazzled eyes are strong enough again to look upon them steadily, will only give

new reason for reverential awe and resolute endeavour. "Positive knowledge"—it is no emotional evangelist, it is Herbert Spencer, who asserts—"does not, and never can, fill the whole region of possible thought." At the uttermost reach of discovery there arises, and must ever arise, the question, "What lies beyond?" "It is not the geologist's hammer"—to use the noble words of Oliver Wendell Holmes—"or the astronomer's telescope, or the naturalist's microscope, that is going to take away the need of the human soul for that Rock to rest upon which is higher than itself, that Star which never sets, that all-pervading Presence which gives life to all the least moving atoms of the immeasurable universe." Science is wonderful, Science is admirable, Science is indispensable, but Science is not sufficient, it is not everything. Whatever be the discoveries which are made, whatever be the enlargement of our knowledge, our hearts are athirst for something more. In spite of all the unquestionable benefits which modern culture and civilisation have brought, we need that which culture and civilisation cannot give, we need the assurance that we are not the playthings of caprice, that our life is not mere vanity and nothingness, that our sins can be forgiven and our hearts made clean, that we are encompassed with inalienable Love, that we have a hope within the veil. In the face of duty and trial and temptation and bereavement and death, we need the comfort and the inspiration which the Gospel of Christ bestows. Amid the stress and strain, the speculations and the movements, the agitations and the revolutions of the twentieth century, we need, almost more than any of the generations that are gone, to give ear to the Voice which never ceases to proclaim, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Four Characters

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"*They departed from the presence of the council,*" &c.—Acts v. 41, 42.

The Church, that is, the company and congregation of the faithful, had received a startling proof of the nearness of God to them, and of the perilous responsibility involved in being a Christian. It is indeed playing with edge-tools to be a worshipper or a believer by halves. First to draw nigh to God in sacraments and services, and then to trifle with Him; first to profess to believe in a heart searching God, and then to try experiments upon His penetration; this is a fearful risk indeed. This is what Ananias and Sapphira dared to do; and their awful history is told in Scripture for the admonition and warning of every later and latest age. That was a picture of the Church from its inner side; of the Christian body in its relation to Christ its Head. And now we are to view again its outer aspect; towards the world that looked on; and looked on with varied feelings, of respectful awe, of admiring gratitude, of bitter hostility, or of candid observation.

"By means of the hands of the Apostles many signs and wonders took place among the people." A *wonder*, or *miracle*, is a simple surprise; something out of the course of nature, as we speak: a *sign* or *signal* is a wonder which points to something; a departure from the course of nature which intends to call attention to a hand or to a person out of sight. All the Christian miracles are signs also. "And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch": that was the mustering place, the head quarters, of the community, in public. "And of the rest," of those who did not yet believe, "no one presumed to attach

himself to them." A sort of sanctity hung visibly about them, which warned off idle intrusion. It was not, as now, that whoever was nothing else called himself a Christian; or that people could come and go to the Christians' assembly and to the Christians' worship unquestioned and unchallenged: there was a meaning then, a felt meaning, in the profession of faith; and the recent example of Divine severity, the exposure and the fate of two pretenders, two intruders into the camp of the saints, added doubtless, to that awe which, like the pillar of fire and cloud in the Exodus, separated between the army of Israel and the host of Egypt.

No one presumed to attach himself to them without believing: "but the people magnified them"; the common people paid them all reverence and honour: "and more" even than before "were believing persons" constantly "being added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."

There was a general impression of the power, and of the beneficence of the new faith and its professors; "so that throughout the streets people carried out the sick and placed them upon couches and beds, that, as Peter came, even his shadow might overshadow some one of them." Like the believing touch of our Lord's own garment, the very lying for a moment under Peter's shadow availed for restoration where there was the mind of faith. It needed not a touch, it needed not a word; it was enough if the very shadow rested upon the sick man as the great Apostle went by. It was not necessary, if God was pleased to work, that He should work in this mode rather than in that: the touch was but a sign, the word was but an indication, of the outcoming of the healing virtue: it was not necessary that either should be employed: the shadow, if He wills, may do as well. "There came together also" daily "the multitude (population) of the cities round Jerusalem, carrying sick persons and any troubled (molested) by unclean spirits, and they were healed all."

Such an excitement could not but attract the renewed attention of the enemies of the Gospel. "The high priest rose up," prepared himself for an act of vigour, "and all who were with him," his assessors and advisers, "that which is the party of the Sadducees"—these deniers of spirit and of the resurrection were then in the ascendant—"and were filled with jealousy" at the success of the new religion, "and laid their hands on the Apostles, and got them placed in public custody. But an Angel of the Lord, through (in the course of) the night, opened the doors of the prison, and led them out, and said, Go, and taking your stand in the temple speak to the people all the words of this life"; of this heavenly, this eternal life, with the announcement of which you are charged. "And when they heard this, they entered at daybreak into the temple and began to teach. And the high priest having arrived" at the usual place of meeting—in a hall (it is said) adjoining the great gate of the Temple—"and they that were with him, they called together the council, and all the elderhood of the sons of Israel"—the assembly known as the Sanhedrin, or religious council of the seventy elders—"and sent to the prison for them to be brought. And the officers that came there found them not in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, The prison-house we found closed," locked and barred, "in all security, and the guards standing at the door; but when we opened it we found no one within. And when they heard these words, both the high priest and the captain of the temple"—the Jewish officer who commanded the Levitical guard—"and the chief priests," the heads and leaders of the priestly body, "they were at a loss concerning them what this thing might become," to what result all this might come. "And someone arrived, and reported to them, Behold, the men whom ye caused to be placed in the prison are standing in the

temple and teaching the people. Then the captain (of the temple) departed with the officers, and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned; and they brought them, and set them in (before) the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on the ground of this name; and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and wish to bring upon us the blood of this man." But Peter answered, and the Apostles, and said, "We must obey God rather than men. If He lays a charge upon us, we must fulfil it, come what may. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye dispatched by hanging Him on a tree: Him did God exalt as a Prince and a Saviour by (with) His own right hand," by the exercise of His Almighty power, "to give repentance to Israel and dismissal of sins. And we are His witnesses of these words," of the truth of these facts, "and the Holy Spirit also, Whom God gave to those who obey Him." The descent of the Holy Ghost on the great Day of Pentecost was God's own witness borne along with the human evidence of things actually seen and known.

"And they when they heard were cut to the heart"—literally, "were sawn asunder," as it were, by the violence of their rage and fury—"and they took counsel to slay them. But there rose one in the council, a Pharisee, by name Gamaliel"—the instructor in early days of St. Paul himself—"a teacher of the law, honourable in the judgment of all the people, and urged them to put the men out for a short time," that the discussion might be more freely carried on; "and, when this was done, said to them, Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves with regard to these men what ye are about to do." This is, in one sense, not the first case of the kind with which you have had to deal. Some time ago there was Theudas, a man of large professions, who collected a body of four hundred followers, and you saw what it all came to: he was put to death, and his party dispersed and annihilated. Then there was Judas of Galilee—the thing again—first a brief success, and then utter ruin. Therefore I counsel calmer measures. "Refrain from these men: let them alone." If their plans and their proceedings are of men only, depend upon it the enterprise will come to a natural end: it will meet the fate of all human enterprises against law and order. But if it should so happen, that in this one instance we have a work of God to deal with, all your efforts to put it down will be in vain; and you must take good care lest, in opposing it, you should be found to be fighting against God. The weight of a great name, and (we may well suppose) the manifest wisdom of the counsel itself, prevailed over prejudice and exasperation. "They obeyed him, and calling the Apostles in they beat them"—though uncondemned, though virtually acquitted by their judges, they must still (like their Master before them) be put to this pain and ignominy—"and then charged them not to speak on the ground of the name of Jesus, and released them. They then went their way rejoicing from the presence of the council, because they were deemed worthy to be disgraced in behalf of the Name," the great and sacred Name of their beloved Lord: "and throughout every day, in the temple, and at home, they ceased not to teach and to proclaim the glad tidings of the Christ as being Jesus"; as having come in the person of Jesus; to declare one to another, and in the hearing of Israel, that the Messiah, promised of old, was come, and come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, first crucified, now risen. "We have found Him, of Whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph."

The use which I would make of the passage thus summarily glanced at, is as an exhibition of various characters by which we may test and judge our own.

1. And first, there is the character of the chief priests and elders ; faithful still to their conduct towards Christ Himself ; persecuting the servant as they before had persecuted the Lord. One new feature there is in this persecution. It is, more distinctly than in the Gospels, a Sadducean hostility. And most natural it was that a Gospel built upon a resurrection should irritate most strongly the sect which denied that great hope of man. While it was a mere tenet of doctrine, they bore it with composure : when it became a statement of fact, it was at once a struggle for life and death. Thus there were occasions, of which this Book in its later chapters will tell, when the Pharisee, confessing the Resurrection, lends his aid to the faith which is suffering in that behalf. And great as were the faults of the Pharisee, severe as his condemnation was from the lips of Him Who is truth, he had yet in some respects a shorter path to traverse if once his steps should be turned in the direction of Christ's Kingdom. The Sadducee was a cold, scoffing, irreligious materialist.

The spirit of the Sadducee is in all of us by nature, struggling in us for the mastery with that of the Pharisee and the Herodian. Each one of these is but the development of one attribute of fallen nature. What is the Sadducee but the man who avows his disbelief in mysteries of which we all have too feeble a grasp ? I might ask, which of us has a firm hold of those particular revelations, the denial of which would make a Sadducee of him by profession ? Which of us really and truly expects the resurrection, or can say with any consistency in the words of our Creed, " I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come " ? And if the best of us rather gropes amidst these things in the dark, than walks among them as in the light of perfect day, what shall we say of those who have accustomed themselves to treat everything lightly till nothing is serious, nothing is grave to them : who have a jest ready for every revelation, and a scoff for every demand of duty, till at length they can neither tremble at God's terrors nor believe in God's love ? O the bitterness of the scoffer, towards one who possesses a hope which he has flung away ! O the acrimony with which he exposes a weakness, and watches for a fall, in one of Christ's servants ! The persecutors of the Christian are amongst us still, and oftentimes they are persecutors in conduct because they are first Sadducees in spirit. May such persons, if any such there be amongst us, ask themselves seriously this one question, Am I certain that I shall never want Christ myself ; want Him in loneliness and sorrow, want Him in age and sickness, want Him in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment ? If I know not this, and know it not for certain, let me take heed how I now make it impossible that I should ever seek Him then !

2. When we turn from this extreme of hostility to the cause of Christ, through the various stages which separate it from an entire devotion, are we not struck with the existence in these days of many a Gamaliel ; of many a man who is at once observant and candid, anxious to do nothing rashly, waiting, rather, to examine credentials, or even to see the end, before he pronounces himself decisively either for or against the Gospel ? These men have much in them that is attractive, and at first sight all that is reasonable. What can we desire more, we are ready to ask, than that a person be open-minded and calmly judging ; an adviser of caution, a hater of precipitation, in decisions for eternity ; a man reminding the powerful of the rights of the humble, and the prejudiced of the supremacy of truth ? What but good can come, we might enquire, of that prudent and sensible reminder, in a time of religious excitement and enthusiasm, " If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, and see lest haply ye be found even to

fight against God"? O for a voice, we say, so calm and so judicial, to mediate and to moderate in the dissensions of party zeal! And no doubt such a voice is useful; useful in the counsels of rulers, useful on the bench of judges. Happy the nation which has such men amongst its counsellors, when an act of hasty tyranny is in danger of treading out the spark of grace and truth! Such a man is far removed from the enemies of Christ, if he be not yet enrolled amongst His friends. This was the part of Nicodemus, when the case of One greater than the Apostles was at issue, and he reminded his impetuous colleagues of that first maxim of equity, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" Not long afterwards, he who at first came to Jesus by night, and who even at this stage in his history is a timid and doubting ally, is found tending the lifeless corpse from which Apostles have fled panic-stricken, and testifying a love and a devotion refused by men who owe to Christ their all.

But yet we must not overrate a quality which has so much in it of good. Candour, moderation, an open mind and a calm judgment, these are useful qualities, these, at certain times, may rise even into great virtues. But we dare not say that any one of them, or that all of them together, will suffice to save a soul. There are just a few great questions on which minds ought to be made up; on which if the evidence we possess be not sufficient for conviction, it is our first and most bounden duty to seek and to obtain more. Such a question, above all others, is that of the truth and power, of the person and work, of the Messiahship and Divinity, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To be candid on this subject is better indeed than to be prejudiced, scoffing, or hostile: but there is a third alternative besides these two; and he who is merely candid concerning Christ is in danger of a life-long suspense, of an ultimate indifference. Men of mere candour, admirable and beautiful as that gift is, are commonly men who in great emergencies disappoint, and in critical decisions are even worse than foes. Their presence is fatal to generous impulses, to noble enthusiasms.

3. I would have distinguished, did time permit, a third character among those here presented; that of the common people who "magnified" the believers though they durst not join them, and who gladly used, though it were but from a distance, their beneficent and healing power. These, too, have their counterpart amongst us. There are men, and there are women, now in the midst of us, who reverence religion with all their hearts; who count the Christian alone happy; who delight, as it were, to gather the crumbs beneath the sacred table, to profit by Christian converse and to record the triumphs of the Gospel; but who yet shrink from counting themselves very members of that holy fellowship; never think themselves worthy even of an approach to the sacramental feast; and if they should die in this state, would die with faintest hope of attaining to the inheritance of the saints in light. Such persons are not against Christ, yet neither are they yet quite with Him. They are something more than candid enquirers; something far, far beyond men waiting, like Gamaliel, to see the end, and judge from a point wholly out of sight, a point unattainable on earth, of the testimonials and credentials of the Gospel. Would that they could be led, by God's grace, to cross boldly that narrow margin, and become not spectators only, but inmates of the sacred porch of Solomon!

4. Finally, the text itself, and the passage now reviewed, tells us of a fourth character, that of the not *almost* but *altogether* Christian. Hear his creed as it is rehearsed in this record. "I believe that I ought to obey God rather than men. I believe that Christ died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification. I believe that God has exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour.

I believe that the very purpose of that exaltation is that He may bestow repentance and bestow forgiveness. I believe that God for His sake gives His Holy Spirit to all who set themselves in His strength to obey." What is this but the faith of our own Church, handed down to us from days when Peter and Paul, when John and James, yet trod the earth? This is the faith of which it was written, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." This was the faith which enabled Apostles to brave persecution, nay, to rejoice to be "counted worthy to suffer shame," or even death itself, "for the name," the one sufficient name in which alone is salvation. My brethren, who can doubt which of these four characters is the one which it would be happiest to live with, safest and most glorious to possess in death? Believe only, and it shall be yours! It is not far off from thee, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up to Heaven for me, that he may fetch it and give it? or, Who shall go over the sea for me, and bring it to me, that I may take it and wear it? Nay, it is very nigh thee; offered thee freely, made thine by prayer: whosoever will may have it for the asking. God of His infinite mercy endue us all with it; that earnest faith, that bright hope, that generous love, that noble courage! Then, come life or come death, it must be well with us: for "we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Chapter VI

The Church Organizing Herself

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

*"In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied," &c.
Acts vi. 1-7.*

When Christianity was born into the world, it was wrapped in Jewish swaddling-clothes. These swaddling-clothes were bound tightly round it, and impeded its free action. All the Apostles were Jews; and the Apostle who, in the counsels of God's Providence, was to be the leader of the Christian movement, Peter, was strongly under the influence of Jewish prejudices. Even after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him at Pentecost, it needed a vision and a voice from Heaven, and an intimation from the Holy Spirit, and an extraordinary coincidence, to induce St. Peter to hold social intercourse with men of another nation. And when he was compelled to admit the propriety of such intercourse, we still find him, with that moral weakness which had been so painfully exhibited in his denial of Christ, struggling against his own deliberate convictions. "When certain persons were come from James," St. Paul tells us (certain members, that is, of the Judaizing party), St. Peter "withdrew and separated himself" from Gentile society in Antioch, "fearing them which were of the circumcision." It was clear that if the leadership of the Church were to be exclusively committed to St. Peter, the new Society would never become what its Founder intended it to be, Catholic; but would retain to the end its original character of a Jewish sect. Therefore, as God works by human agents, human agents must be found or prepared, who might unwind the swaddling-clothes of Jewish prejudice, and be instrumental in giving the Church a freer action. Such men were ready to hand. There was a large body of Jews, termed Hellenists, or Grecians, who had come under the influence, and had deeply imbibed the spirit, of Greek civilization. They spoke Greek, and read the Old Testament in the Greek translation

of it, called the Septuagint, not in the original Hebrew. But their language was only an outward symptom of the habits of thought and the manners which they had adopted. While they were Jews in religion (some of them born so, others proselytes—converts from heathenism), they had an acquaintance with Gentile life and Gentile literature, which gave them more expanded views than the Aramaic-speaking Jews, who had never lived out of Palestine. These men acted as a bridge of communication between the Jewish and the Gentile mind, being Jews in their acknowledgment of Jehovah, and Gentiles in habit of thought; and they were the great instruments in the hands of God's Providence for unsectarianizing the infant Church, and giving it a Catholic character. Now the point of the Acts of the Apostles at which I take up the history, is just where this agency is brought upon the stage. The names of the seven Deacons are all Greek names; and it may hence be inferred that all of them were Hellenists. It was very judicious to choose such persons for the office; for the object was to extinguish a complaint of the Hellenists against the Hebrews. The complaints would be most easily extinguished by setting those to remedy the alleged wrongs who, being Hellenists themselves, might be supposed to act in the interests of the injured party. It is the part sustained by one of these Hellenists which leads to the introduction of St. Paul upon the stage of the history. At St. Stephen's martyrdom Saul of Tarsus was present and assisted. And the prayer of St. Stephen for his murderers, seconding the moral effect of the spectacle of his demeanour, won for the Church the conversion and the great ministry of St. Paul. Now St. Paul, we know, was God's great instrument in the conversion of the Gentiles; it was St. Paul, far more than any other single man, who unwound the swaddling-clothes of the Church's infancy, and gave her free course and unimpeded action among all the nations of the earth. And St. Stephen's prayers and example were instruments in St. Paul's conversion. And St. Stephen was an Hellenist, appointed officially to the guardianship of Hellenist interests.

We see, then, the exact point at which we take up the history. It is when the Christian Church, which is yet a bud upon the old Jewish stem, is bursting with new life, opening, for the first time, to receive into her bosom the Gentiles as fellow-citizens with the saints, and members, no less than the Jew, of the household of God.

This bursting of the bud took place after the following manner. A community of goods prevailed in the Church at Jerusalem. Those Christians who possessed property, animated, in the first fervours of their conversion, by a glorious contempt of this world's wealth, and drawn together in bonds of sympathy with all those who professed the same hope as themselves, sold their lands and houses, and threw the proceeds into a common fund, which was administered to the poor by daily instalments. As the new converts increased, this daily distribution soon outgrew the control of the Apostles. To see to it properly would have taken up their whole time. Complaints of unfairness arose; it was said that the claims of the widows of the Hellenists to maintenance out of the common fund were ignored. The Apostles immediately take steps to remove the ground of complaint. Their charge was too onerous for them; and a portion of it must be delegated to other hands. Moses had found it necessary to petition for duly qualified persons to bear with him the burden of a murmuring people; and the Divine Master of the Apostles had on one occasion refused to appear in the character of a judge as to worldly property, and a divider of temporalities. It is probable that both of these examples suggested to the Apostles the step to be taken on the present occasion. They propose to the whole body of Christians

to appoint seven officers, who might be deputed to administer the Church Fund, and to give to every member of God's household his portion of bodily food in due season. As for themselves, they would dispense only the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, and minister only to spiritual necessities. The disciples chose these officers; the Apostles, in whose office was wrapped up the entire administration of the Church, appointed them by laying on of hands. The result justified completely the wisdom of the arrangement. The seven Hellenist almoners soon set right the little partialities complained of. Well organised internally, the Church carried on with vigour the work of proselytism. By the order and energy of its administration (the marks of an inherent vitality) its bitterest enemies were struck with admiration, and a large multitude of the Jewish priests became obedient to the faith.

But more than this. The new Institution gave the first impulse to great spirits, who rose high above their position. The Lord had said that the last should be first; and Stephen, one of the new Deacons, though officially in a subordinate position, outstripped Apostles in the fervour of his zeal and love and snatched before any one of them the palm of martyrdom.

The great point in this narrative which gives room for practical observations is that the organization of the Church took its shape from circumstances as they arose. This might conceivably have been otherwise. During the forty days which elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension, our Blessed Lord spake to His Apostles, we are told, of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. He might, if it had so pleased Him, in that space of time have prescribed the exact form which the constitution of His Church should take, have warned the Apostles, for example, that they would require help in the lower department of their functions, and have indicated the steps they should take to secure such help. Previous prescription, guided by His divine foresight of the Church's future, might have settled all things for her beforehand. But far other than this was to be the line which her course should take. She was endowed at Pentecost with the indwelling Spirit of her Master, a Spirit Which made His Divine Presence with her not a mere memory of the past, but a reality of the present. For what purpose was this indwelling Spirit granted, but to enable her to legislate for herself as emergencies arose?

Finally, we have here an instance of what has often been witnessed—how wise Institutions develop and bring out great characters. St. Stephen and St. Philip had not acquired celebrity in Church history before; perhaps never would have acquired it had it not been that the new office entrusted them called forth all their energies. Now here there is a great lesson of wisdom. We believe that there are many persons warmly interested in the Christian cause who might do something (perhaps might do great things) in the service of the Church, if their energies had some regular and natural channel to flow in. There is many a man whose powers are wasted for want of a position. Give him a sphere, and he will become a valuable helpmate; deny him a sphere, and the motive power that is in him is thrown away. It is for this reason that we rejoice to see, at this critical period of our Church's history, numerous agencies springing up to supplement the lack of service in the regular ministry of God's Word. We need not assert that all these agencies are in all respects what might be desired. Some of them may have a flaw in their fundamental principles; others, though sound in theory, may be found on trial to work ill. Still, in all attempted developments of the organization of the Church, we look hopefully to the result. The office of the seven deacons was a bright conception; it was an experiment which succeeded nobly, and brought forth glorious fruit. And we know not

why the modern Church, in determining to do her Master's work faithfully, and in dependence upon His Spirit, should not act upon the same principle, and make trial of new agencies, and what might even be called new forms of ministry, to meet the demands of new times. Providence does not stand still; opinion moves restlessly onward; why should not the Church of Christ adapt herself with the suppleness and elasticity of life to the onward march of mind and events? In doing so, she may possibly develop great powers, which are now lying hid in her bosom; and, called forth by the exigencies of a new position, a Stephen and a Philip may come upon the stage to play a brilliant part in the service of our Heavenly Master.

Stephen the Precursor of Paul

BY REV. A. R. SYMONDS, M.A.

"A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."—Acts vi. 5.

Stephen was one of those ecclesiastical officers who were nominated by the Congregation, and appointed by the Apostles, to attend to the right administration of the charitable fund of the Church. From the qualifications required and the solemn manner in which the Seven Deacons were set apart, it would seem that they were not mere charity commissioners, but were invested also with spiritual functions. At all events, one of them, Stephen, at once engages in spiritual work, and evinces singular power as a preacher and controversialist. From his Greek name, Στέφανος, which means a crown, it is evident that he was a Hellenist.

Now at this time there were in Jerusalem synagogues for Hebrews and synagogues for Hellenists, on account of the difference of language and Scripture version used. In these, as well as to the people generally, Stephen boldly preached Christ crucified, and that with such energy and wisdom, with such demonstration of the Spirit and power, with such accompanying attestation of miracles and wonders, that numerous converts even among the Priests were made, and that none could stand before him in argument. Naturally, great exasperation was the result of this on the part of the defeated disputants; and, as too often happens in theological controversy, what they could not put down by logic they resolved to crush by persecution. Setting their creatures to work to misrepresent his teaching, saying that he calumniated Moses, they created such an excitement and clamour against Stephen throughout the city, as to lead to his apprehension and arraignment before the Sanhedrin or great Church Council. Standing at this tribunal, the accusation laid against him was as follows: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Now gross as the perversion was of the nature of Stephen's preaching, there was so much of truth in the accusation as to give it some colour of plausibility, and consequently to render it necessary for him to give it a careful reply. Of course he had not uttered any blasphemous words against Moses or against the Temple or against the Law, but no doubt he had spoken of the preparatory and prefigurative character of the Mosaic dispensation, as one that was to give way to a better dispensation, to be brought in by the Messiah. No doubt he had declared that the Temple worship would sooner or later pass away, and the Temple itself be destroyed. No doubt he had proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth

as the Messiah, and had plainly intimated that in Him, through faith in Him, Jew and Gentile became one, and stood on equal footing before God. No doubt he had insisted and enlarged upon the Lord's own words, that neither on Gerizim, nor yet in Jerusalem, nor in any other one sacred spot, should men worship God, but that in every place, where men worshipped God as a Spirit in spirit and in truth, there were the true worshippers whom the Father would have to worship Him. *Paul*

Such, we may certainly infer, was the tenor of St. Stephen's preaching and argumentation. And herein, you observe, he was the precursor of St. Paul, whom God subsequently raised up to testify to and to carry forward these very truths with such signal power and success. Herein, too, you perceive how Stephen was actually in advance of the Twelve Apostles, none of whom up to that time had dreamt of the passing away of the Jewish economy, or of the admission of the Gentiles to equal spiritual privileges with the Jews. It was not till some time after this that Peter learnt the salvability of the Gentiles, and that by a special vision. To the last James and others clung to the Temple and its ceremonial; and you remember how long after this, when St. Paul had taken up and preached this very doctrine, the elders of the Church at Jerusalem admonished him to be careful to conciliate those Christian Jews who were zealous for the law. All this goes to show how immensely Stephen was in advance of his time, nay, even of the Apostles themselves.

Such being the character of his teaching, we wonder not that it caused intense excitement, and called forth bitter resentment. Formidable, however, as was the array against him, the bold spirit of this noble witness for Christ quailed not. Confronting the Council, Stephen rose to the occasion, his soul kindling within him, and his face radiant with serene brightness. At this eventful moment Stephen realised to the full the Saviour's promise, "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father Which speaketh in you." With great power did that Spirit now come upon him, filling his heart with courage, his mind with wisdom, and shedding celestial light upon his countenance. "And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel." Awed for a moment apparently by this, the High Priest, the President of the Council, with reference to the charges against Stephen, mildly puts to him the question, "Are these things so?" Then Stephen enters upon his defence; in which, taking a rapid survey of the history of the chosen people, he evinces his own reverence for and faith in the sacredness of the Jewish economy, but indicating that spiritual interpretation of it which had always been the true one, and the truth of which was now to be made manifest to all.

For the right appreciation of Stephen's address, we must keep constantly in view the charge made against him of blasphemy against Moses and the Law, and what he had really preached concerning the passing away of the old economy and the opening of the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. We must remember, too, that the speech is an unfinished one, and that it presents premises rather than a worked out conclusion. Still, as far as it goes, we can see that the drift of it is to refute the charge of blasphemy, while justifying the doctrine he had preached. He shows in various instances that the presence and favour of Jehovah had not been confined to the Holy Land or to Jerusalem; that the Law in which they trusted had not kept their forefathers from idolatry; that Moses himself had intimated his own supersession by a Prophet greater than he; that Solomon and Isaiah hath both declared the inadequacy of any temple

to be the habitation of the Most High or the place of His exclusive worship.

It would seem that, as he came to this point in his address, Stephen saw a change in the aspect of his judges, owing perhaps to their now for the first time catching the drift of his meaning. Suddenly breaking off, therefore, in his narrative, he turns upon them, with language of impassioned rebuke, for their resistance of the Spirit of God, their rejection and murder of Jesus, and their violation of the divine Law. So cutting was the reproof that they were sawn asunder in their hearts, and gnashed their teeth with rage.

The crisis was now at hand, and to sustain him through it Stephen is favoured with a special vision. Lifting up his eyes to Heaven and gazing into it he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the Right Hand of God. Filled with the Holy Ghost he exclaims, "I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." This was more than they could bear; to be told of the divine exaltation of Him Whom they had crucified, and Who not long before, when standing before this very Council, had said, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the Right Hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." Breaking into a loud yell, and stopping their ears that they might hear no more such blasphemous words, they rushed upon him and tumultuously dragged him to execution. As the stones fell upon him, Stephen calls upon God, repeating the Saviour's own words upon the Cross, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, sinking on his knees, like that Saviour, too, he prayed for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

"He fell asleep!" What a peaceful end of a violent proceeding; what a calm conclusion to a narrative of cruelty and bloodshed. Not a word of invective does the historian utter against the perpetrators of this crime. "He fell asleep." What a blessed significance, too, the expression bears, indicating as it does that the holy Martyr had simply gone to rest, to wake up again on the morning of the resurrection, when the sleeping Saint shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth from the grave to meet Him.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death." And not consenting only, but a prominent promoter of it. It was he who took charge of the clothes of the witnesses, which they took off to do the work more easily, which they had to do, of throwing the first stones. And he himself confesses that he approved of Stephen's death. And yet it was upon this man that Stephen's mantle fell. There can be no doubt that Saul heard Stephen's defence, and like the rest was infuriated by it. Not improbably he had been one of those in the synagogue of Cilicia who had argued with Stephen, and had not been able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Yet this was the man who took up the cause for which Stephen died, and became its most able, zealous, and successful advocate. The doctrine of freedom from the Law and of the equal justification of all who believe in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, of which Stephen sounded the key-note in Jerusalem, Paul, once Saul his persecutor, proclaimed throughout the world. It seems not improbable that the first convictions of this truth were planted in the mind of Saul during his controversy with Stephen, in hearing his defence, and in witnessing his heroic death; convictions which, in his Jewish pride and Pharisaic self-righteousness, he tried to conceal from himself and to smother by rushing into a course of furious zeal and action against the Christians. Psychologically considered, the subsequent passion of hate and rage exhibited by him is perfectly consistent with, nay, in some measure is to be accounted for by, these secret misgivings at which his proud spirit chafed. May it not have been in allusion to these tormenting suspicions and pangs of remorse, that

it was afterwards said to him, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

It has ever been the faith of the Church that Saul was the fruit of Stephen's prayers. "Si Stephanus non orasset, Ecclesia Paulum non haberet," was one of its sayings. Certainly, in the death of Stephen and its results we have an eminent instance of how God can make the wrath of man to praise Him; and how the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church. Often it seems a dark and untoward event when eminent men are suddenly removed from the scene of their usefulness, just at the time when their services appear most useful. So it must have seemed to the Church at Jerusalem, when one so full of wisdom, energy, and power as Stephen, one so able to cope with adversaries and to vindicate the truth, was thus taken away. We wonder not that devout men made great lamentation over him. And yet, disastrous as it seemed, it was really the occasion, under the sovereign disposal of the great Head of the Church, of light shining out of darkness and of good springing out of evil. The quenching of Stephen's light was the kindling of a yet brighter lamp for the illumination of the world. Brethren, bear in mind what made Stephen so eminent a witness for Christ's truth. He was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. Herein he stands before us as one of the great worthies, who fought the good fight and laid hold of eternal life. In such instances we see what divine grace can accomplish. The God of grace give to you and to me that grace to be faithful in life and faithful unto death, that we, too, may obtain that crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Stephen's Miracles and Controversies

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders," &c.—Acts vi. 8-10.

These verses inform us of this interesting particular—that Stephen was a monument of our Lord's fidelity to His recorded promises. The disciple was faithful to the Master even unto death, and he found the Master faithful unto him both in life and death. Our Lord's parting promise to believers had been this: "These signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." In pursuance of this promise, "Stephen," we are told, "did great miracles and wonders among the people," a power which, probably, had been conveyed to him by the laying on of the Apostles' hands. Then again, in controversy, our Lord had promised His disciples a mouth and wisdom in the following words: "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand what ye shall answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." St. Luke is the only Evangelist who records the Lord's words in this form; and when he relates in his Acts of the Apostles, how the adversaries of St. Stephen "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake," he must surely have glanced back at the promise recorded in his Gospel, and have intended his readers to remark that here was a notable fulfilment of it.

I. First we will say a word of the great wonders and miracles wrought by this servant of the Lord.

Observe, then, how carefully the writer guards us against the supposition of St. Stephen being a mere wonder-worker; how he traces the wonders and

the miracles up to a certain principle of his character, and recognizes them as being the outcome of the faith (or of the grace) that was in him. He does not merely record the miracles, but puts us in possession of the secret of them. "Stephen, *full of faith and power*, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Some of the better manuscripts read "grace and power"; but whichever reading be adopted, the great scope of the clause is the same; the secret of the miracles was the "faith" or the "grace," and the power of God which that faith drew down, or that grace communicated, to the soul of St. Stephen. The power of God, I say, which the faith drew down. For it is a great truth that the man who acts in faith, whether he works a miracle in the ordinary sense of the word, or only achieves successfully some great enterprise for Christ, which does not seem to involve any suspension of natural laws, does not use, when he acts, any inherent power, but simply lays hold of, and calls into exercise, the power of God and of Christ. And what is true of miracles is equally true of all the triumphs and successes of Grace. If I win a victory over a besetting sin, if I am brought out unharmed from a great furnace of temptation, it is not in my own strength, but in Christ's that the result is achieved. Inherent strength of his own the holiest saint in the world has none. Pagan ethics indeed speak of an inherent power which is communicated to the soul by virtuous habits. The Holy Scriptures know nothing of this inherent strength; they resolve all spiritual power (whether miraculous or ordinary) into one simple principle—that utter dependence upon God, which calls God into exercise on behalf of the creature. The very first element of all power (miraculous or moral) according to the Holy Scriptures, is profound self-distrust. The vine-branch has no sap, and consequently no power of fructification, of its own; the sap must be sent up into the branch from the stem; separate the branch from the tree, and you will be convinced that it has no independent life or energy. A little child is quite incompetent to a long walk, in the course of which there are thickets to be marched through, and mountains to be crossed, and rivers to be waded; but if, in confessed impotence, it throws itself into its father's arms as often as it comes to a difficulty, he will carry it through the thickets, and over the mountains, and wade with it across the rivers; and thus only can it be brought safe to its journey's end. Sanctification, in its source and efficient cause, is not more inherent than justification. "In the Lord have I righteousness," doubtless, but not righteousness only; the testimony does not end so, but "in the Lord have I righteousness *and strength*."

And thus, by this notice of the grace (or faith) and power by which they were performed, the miracles of St. Stephen are denoted as the miracles of a true prophet; they stand in connexion with the faith or grace which was in him. For it is ever to be remembered that miracles alone are no sufficient criterion of truth, or of a Divine mission in him who works them. Our Lord had solemnly warned His disciples in His last great prophecy: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." But the genuine miracle, wrought by the power of God, may be discriminated not only by the character of the doer, but by its own moral scope and significance. The great object of miracles in the system of religion is to rouse the mind out of its habitual lethargy, and incline it to listen to Divine truth. Like a bell which summons people to church, where perchance they may receive some important message from God, miracles collect the public round an ambassador of God, and give weight to his teaching. It is implied in our narrative that this was the case with Stephen's miracles. They could not fail, and they did not fail, to draw

general attention. It was this general attention which roused the Jews into the active opposition described in the succeeding verse. The connexion is slightly obscured by the mistranslation of a particle. The "then" of the A.V. should be exchanged for "but." "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." These miracles, the writer implies, excited much attention; and thus success seemed to attend his ministry. "BUT" (the success was not without its hindrances; the course of the Gospel did not run smoothly) "there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, &c., disputing with Stephen." The miracles gained an entrance for the Word (and this is the object of true miracles), but the Word met with its obstructions.

II. These obstructions took the shape of controversies in which the Jews were, and felt themselves to be, defeated. It is said by Rabbinical writers that there were in Jerusalem 480 synagogues. Among these several would be appropriated to the Hellenistic Jews—to those Jews, that is, who, for whatever reasons (whether as being proselytes from the Gentiles or as having adopted foreign customs from the settlement of themselves and their ancestors in Gentile countries) were imbued with the spirit of Greek civilization. Stephen, as we have seen, was, in all probability, a Hellenistic Jew himself; and thus his early associations, as well as his office, would bring him into contact with members of the Hellenistic synagogues. It is somewhat remarkable that among his opponents we should find representatives of each of the three great continents then known. The first synagogue mentioned went under the name of the Synagogue of the Libertines. A libertine is the Latin word for a freedman; and these Libertines were in all probability Jews, whose ancestors had been carried captive to Rome by Pompey and others, and had there, in process of time, been emancipated from the condition of slavery. Tacitus tells us that, in the reign of Tiberius, an order was made by the senate that four thousand freedmen of the Jewish persuasion should be transported into the island of Sardinia, to make war upon the freebooters who ravaged the island; and that such as were not able to bear arms should be required to migrate from Italy, unless, before a stated day, they formally renounced their religion. Many of them, we may suppose, would migrate to the home of their religion, Jerusalem; and here they would have a synagogue called the Freedmen's Synagogue, representing the Italian Jews. From this synagogue came Stephen's European antagonists. Cyrene and Alexandria were cities of North Africa. In Cyrene the Jewish residents were a fourth of the whole population. It was a Cyrenian Jew who bore our Lord's Cross after Him; and another Cyrenian Jew who, previously to St. Paul's first mission joined in laying hands on him. In Alexandria two out of the five districts of the city were inhabited by Jews. These African Jews would have their representatives in the Holy City, brought thither, some for purposes of devotion, some of trade; and these representatives would soon build their own church and have their own congregation. The Asiatic opponents of Stephen were furnished by the representatives of the Jews in Cilicia and Asia, this Asia not being the whole Continent to which we give the name, but that portion of it only which constituted the Roman province, and which was made up of four districts—Lydia, Mysia, Caria, Phrygia. The mention of Cilicia is particularly significant. For St. Paul, according to his own testimony, was a native of "Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, brought up, however, in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel." Now we know from the next chapter that Saul of Tarsus assisted, and was an accomplice, in the martyrdom of Stephen. We may therefore infer, with great probability, that in the previous controversies which led to this martyrdom,

the young man whose name was Saul, and who was more exceedingly jealous for the traditions of his fathers, appeared as a disputant against St. Stephen. In his strict Pharasaic education he had all the resources necessary for carrying on a dogged controversy with the rising sect of Christians. Gamaliel, his instructor, who was for years president of the Sanhedrin, and may be called a Pharisee of the Pharisees, as being the head of that theological school of Pharisees which (unlike its rival) maintained that tradition was even superior to the law of Moses. Saul, under much training, would be sure to gather materials for the refutation of what he would then consider deadly heresy; and the strong arguments of his Epistles, after he became a Christian, show clearly that he had the ability to make the most of the advantages which education had given him.

But the result of controversy with Stephen was, it appears, infinitely disappointing and humiliating to his antagonists. They felt themselves, though they would not confess themselves, worsted. "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." No wonder. As the power by which Stephen wrought miracles was the power of Christ, laid hold of by faith, so the wisdom by which he answered his opponents was the wisdom of Christ, given him in pursuance of the promise; "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." The Lord Himself had stricken controversial opponents dumb by this mouth and wisdom. One of His last days upon earth had been spent in baffling those crafty antagonists, who endeavoured to entangle Him in His talk, in answering captious questions, intended to entrap Him, about tribute to Cæsar, about marriage in a future state of existence, about the first and great commandment. Having solved these questions with marvellous wisdom, He then, in His turn, asks His opponents, professing so much skill in the law, what was the parentage of Christ—if Davidical, how then doth David call Him Lord? But the opponents are silenced. "No man was able to answer Him a word: neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

And this was the beginning of the end with our Lord. Infuriated with envy, and stung to the quick by His well-merited invectives, His enemies immediately took counsel to kill Him. In the passage before us the disciple treads closely in the steps of his Master. Stephen's impeachment was arranged, as soon as it was evident that his adversaries were not able to resist the spirit and wisdom by which he spake.

(1). In applying to ourselves what has been said, we will first call attention to the condition of successful controversy. And let me say that what is meant by successful controversy, is controversy which carries the inner conviction of opponents to the truth, not necessarily extorts from them an outward confession of it. This outward confession may be withheld from pride or prejudice, as it was in the case of St. Stephen's opponents; if our argument carries the inward assent of the mind, that is all which argument can do; it cannot force the will. But how very few controversial arguments have really this effect. How very few are anything more than a skirmish of words, in which both parties are exasperated, while neither of them is edified, and each retires from the field more determined than ever to maintain his own opinion. So that people who desire edification of the heart shun altogether the atmosphere of controversy. The strife of arguments on the subject of religion is felt instinctively to be a stifling, unhealthy element, noxious to the tender plant of grace. Yet on the other hand it cannot be denied that the truth, if it be the truth, ought to be able to win its way by its own force—that the Christian should be able to allege a reason of the hope that is in him, and a satisfactory ground for his convictions.

Now perhaps our passage may help us to detect the vice in modern controversies, which mars them for the purpose of intellectual conviction, much more of edification. "I will give you," says our Lord, "*a mouth and wisdom* which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." And again: "It is not ye that speak, but *the Spirit* of your Father Which speaketh in you." The adversaries of Stephen "were not able to resist *the wisdom and the Spirit* by which he spake." Here are three qualifications for controversy: "A mouth," (or power of expression,) "wisdom" (or power of argument), and, lying deeper than both, and giving effect to both, "*a Spirit,*" "*the Spirit of your Father.*" In some modern controversies, nothing but "the mouth" is exhibited. There is a readiness and fluency of expression on both sides; a promptitude in utterance, and a facility in repartee, without any real solidity in reasoning. Occasionally we rise higher than this. There is an exhibition of "wisdom." The opponents are not superficial religionists, who have borrowed their knowledge of the subject from the periodical literature of the day, and bandy it to and fro with the same thoughtless levity with which they would retail a piece of secular news, but men of more or less learning and thought, who have something sound to advance and some real justification of their own opinion. But even this is by no means the only condition of successful controversy. It was "*the Spirit,*" as well as "*the wisdom,*" by which Stephen spake, which his opponents were unable to resist. The naked logic of the intellect will not by itself convince; but the logic which is seconded by unction, and urged with fervour, the logic which is the dictate of a heart in communion with God, carries with it a wonderful weight. This is what our controversies need, to make them edifying, nay, to make them even conclusive, "*the Spirit*" in them. How often do we prove the absence of the Spirit, by our mode of conducting them! How often do the parties engaged forget entirely the gravity and vast importance of the subjects they are speaking of, and bandying to and fro the sacred Names of God, and Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and speaking with almost levity of such subjects as everlasting punishment, and the existence of Satan, virtually incur the guilt of transgressing the third commandment! How differently would controversy act upon others, and re-act upon ourselves, if while engaged in it our hearts were possessed by the Spirit, and our minds thoroughly chastened by a sense of the awful presence of God, Whose cause we are in fact pleading in it! And what an admirable and accurate description of a mind thus chastened does St. Peter give us, when he bids us "give a reason of the hope that is in us *with meekness and fear.*" "*Meekness and fear*"—an acknowledgment that we may be wrong, that truth is not always on one side; and, moreover, that in some controversies we are venturing on very holy ground, where we should put off our shoes from our feet. How lamentably little are these characteristics exhibited in the flippant, pert, confident, often rash discussions, to which the rapid movement of religious opinion among us gives rise. The great clue to right conduct here, as on so many other occasions, is realization of the Presence of God.

(2). Finally, we may draw a profitable lesson from the circumstance of St. Stephen's miracles forming but an introduction to his controversies, breaking open a passage for his arguments to reach the minds and consciences of men. The Gospel was to succeed by the naked force of truth; and the sole object of miracles was to gain an attentive hearing for the messengers of truth. Tell me not of an ecclesiastical authority, then, whose dictates are to be received in its own "*Ipse dixit*"—of a Church, whose dogmas I am bound to accept, without her furnishing satisfactory evidence of them; such an authority and such

a Church are flagrantly unscriptural. The holy Apostles, and St. Stephen (who was imbued with their spirit) did not say after cleansing a few lepers, and restoring sight to the blind, and health to the sick: "These miracles prove that we are sent from God; now listen to us at the peril of your souls, and receive implicitly all that we tell you." Those holy and humble men of heart came down into the lowly valley of disputation; they made a public appeal to the Holy Scriptures; they showed Jesus to be the Christ from documents admitted by their opponents, the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets. Although they had the strongest claims upon the implicit submission of mankind, they never demanded such submission; they rejoiced to see earnest inquiry, and testified to the nobility of mind of those who searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so. When men, who could produce the attestation of miracles in favour of their teaching, so far from resting content with their own assertions, condescended to enter the arena of controversy, and exhibit there "a spirit and wisdom," as in the realm of Nature they had exhibited "a power," how can any modern Communion, which has not the attestation of miracles, make a claim to be believed on its own unsupported testimony? Most certainly it is the office of the Church to be "the pillar and ground of the Truth," to maintain truth, to assert truth, to offer truth for the acceptance of every man; but she is not to demand belief of a single article without producing the Scriptural warrant for such belief. No! we are not to carry assent by overbearing claims, but to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. We are to set forth the reasonableness, the significance, the beauty of the Truth; its adaptedness to the nature and wants of man; the evidences of it which result not only from what it reveals, but also from its very mysteries. If this be done "in the Spirit" as well as in "wisdom," with meekness and fear as well as with argument, Truth will wind its way into the souls of God's people, and find out those whom it is destined to find out. For Grace will go with it, and Grace can never fail of success.

The Arraignment and Transfiguration of St. Stephen

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses," &c.—Acts vi. 11-15.

"Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"—Acts vii. 1.

Stephen's controversial antagonists, infuriated by defeat in argument, resorted to calumny and violence. Agents were employed to set about a story of his having blasphemed Moses and God. When the story got wind, it roused the public indignation of all classes—of "the elders," who represented the old patriarchal magistracies, of "the scribes," who were theologians by profession, and of the common people. Against the servant of Christ were arrayed authority, learning, numbers. His enemies having poisoned the mind of the judges against him, and so ensured an adverse verdict at the trial, thought that matters were now ripe for their proceedings. With precipitate violence they laid hands on him, and hurried him away to the high court of justice, called the Sanhedrin. The members of this court, which consisted of priests, scribes, and elders, sat in the form of a semicircle, the president (who was on this occasion the high priest) being in the middle of the curve, and a scribe, whose duty it was to sum up the votes, and register the sentence being posted at each extremity. In the centre of the line which subtended this curve, stood the prisoner at the bar,

his accuser being on his left hand, and his counsel (when he had one) on the right, in allusion to which latter custom of Jewish courts the Psalmist says, "The Lord shall stand at the right hand of the poor" (act as his advocate), "to save his soul from unrighteous judges."

Stephen, then, was placed before this tribunal, which represented to him the rank, the learning, and the priesthood of his nation. The paid agents of the Hellenist synagogues, advancing to his left, pronounced the formal accusation: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place" (the Temple, near which, or in a precinct of which, the Court was held) "and the law." It is not a little curious to see how much more carefully guarded are the terms of the formal accusation than those of the calumny which had been set about among the people. There is a touch of nature here, as well as an instance of fidelity and accuracy in the narrator. When the actual deposition is made, and the witnesses feel that their words may be called in question, we no more hear those big terms—"blasphemous words against *Moses* and against *God*." God is exchanged for "the holy place," and Moses is exchanged for "the Law," "the customs which Moses delivered unto us." Full well the witnesses knew that no word had ever passed Stephen's lips derogatory to the authority of Moses, much less derogatory to God's glory, though in their general talk they had not hesitated to place this construction upon his declaiming against a merely local worship and a merely ritual religion. Appearing now before a court, they feel tied to a little more of fact, and a little less of assumption; and all they profess to have heard the victim say is: "This Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered us."

No doubt he had said things very much to this effect. His Master had predicted that of all these great buildings there "should not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down"; and Stephen had echoed this prediction. Stephen, too, had probably seen further into the mystery of the admission of the Gentiles into the bosom of the Church than other Christians of his day, and very possibly may have preached, as Paul did after him, that Jewish rites, though instituted by God, and proper to be retained as marks of a national covenant, were non-essential to salvation. But if Stephen had indeed thus foretold the destruction of the Temple and the downfall of the Jewish ceremonial system, why are the witnesses who deposed to this circumstance stigmatized as false witnesses? The answer is instructive. Because, while certifying a matter of fact, they wantonly and wilfully misrepresented the spirit of his teaching. They took his words out of the context which interpreted them, and gave them a totally different colour. Doubtless, like his Master before him, Stephen had the profoundest veneration for the Temple and the Law. But then he had at the same time an intelligent apprehension of the place which the Temple and the Law held in the system of true religion, and of the purposes they were intended to subserve. He saw that the Temple with its ordinances, and the Law with its ritual, were the elements of a preparatory discipline, which schooled the minds of men for the reception of Christ by faith. And now "that faith is come," he would say with Paul, "we are no longer under a schoolmaster." A man who says that a school book may be parted with when education is quite finished, by no means implies that school books are unnecessary while education is in progress. And if the words "School books are valueless" were separated from his explanation of the circumstances which might render them so, and alleged against him, the witness would be a false witness, however certainly, as a matter of fact, the man might have uttered

the words. Be it ever remembered that by telling only half the truth we may convey quite as wrong an impression as by a downright contradiction of truth. And in representing to ourselves or others the views of those who do not belong to our school of religious thought, let us be on our guard, lest we break the ninth commandment, against misconstruction of this sort. Nothing is easier, and alas ! nothing commoner in these days, than to make large and sweeping charges against those who maintain suspected propositions, while wilfully ignoring their explanation of what they hold. I have no right to say that a man is a despiser of God's Ordinances, because he happens not to give the same high place in the religious system to Sacraments which I do ; nor that he is a despiser of the Word of God, because he may doubt the genuineness and authenticity of one of the Canonical Books, or thinks that Scripture was never meant to teach scientific truth ; nor that he denies the inspiration of Holy Writ, because he denies its verbal inspiration ; nor that he impugns the Blessed Atonement, because he asserts certain popular views of it to be mistaken and unscriptural ; nor that he refuses to recognise any authority in the Church, because he thinks that the Scripture must exercise a check upon this authority. The false witness borne against Stephen is an instance of the gross and wicked injustice which may be done by isolating a man's language from an explanatory context, with which in his mouth it has been surrounded.

Stephen heard the calumnious charge laid against him. It is not hard to see what course natural feeling would take in the heart of a man so accused. In the first place there would be indignation at the substantial injustice of the charge. Then would come perplexity and dumbfoundedness, as soon as it became apparent that the charge was so worded, as that he could not meet it with a simple flat denial. With these feelings would mingle fear in a case like this, where a single man stood alone against the authorities and powers of the world, and the fury of his antagonists, and their determination to destroy him, was made evident by their demeanour. And these feelings would produce a painful discomposure and hesitation of mind, which would communicate itself to the features of the accused. But in that exciting moment Stephen retained the most perfect serenity of spirit. His mind at that momentous crisis was buoyant with hope, and radiant with joy. And the hope and joy, as strong emotions frequently do, struggled through the crust wherewith, under ordinary circumstances, the features overlay the expression, and became apparent in his countenance. When the accusation was advanced, every member of the court turned their eyes on him, to see how the servant of Christ, when thus brought to bay would look. Greatly were they surprised, and for the moment disconcerted by his demeanour. This was no wan and haggard culprit, with the furrows of anxiety drawn deep along his countenance ; those features spoke of nothing but communion with the invisible God, and of the love, joy, and peace which are the result of such communion ; " they saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel." The words very possibly indicate, not only the serene joy shed over the features of the martyr by the holy elevation of his soul, but also a supernatural lustre—a lower grade of transfiguration. When our Lord was transfigured " His face," we are told, " did shine as the sun." And it is quite probable that by the intense contemplation of our Lord, a contemplation which, as we read in the next chapter, pierced through the veil of matter, and passed from the region of faith into that of sight, the person of this holy man intercepted and reflected a beam or two of his Master's Glory.

The members of the council are momentarily cowed, as the devil's agents are so often, by the majesty of holy Innocence ; and when the high priest puts

the question to the accused, which invites him to speak in his defence, he does so in a mild, almost relenting, tone, without any of that frenzied virulence which characterised the proceedings of the accusers, and ultimately of the court—"Are these things so?" Possibly the radiance of Stephen's countenance reminded them of that passage in their Law, which describes the shining of the skin of Moses' face. That lustre was the result of the legislator's talking with God; and it might have suggested to them that Stephen had been holding similar communion, and, as in Moses' case, so in Stephen's, the beholders might have been impressed with fear.

Now could there have been any nearer approach than this to the circumstances in which our Blessed Lord had been placed? He, too, had been apprehended with sudden violence by a band of men and officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees. In His case, as in that of His follower, an attempt was made by the malignity of His enemies to suborn agents who might appear against Him; for we read that "the chief priests, and elders, and all the council sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death." He, too, was brought before the Sanhedrin. And there false witness was borne against Him. And the false testimony in His case, as in that of His disciple, was false, not because it attributed to Him words which He had never spoken, but because it totally misrepresented His meaning. The charge was: "We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Words resembling these He no doubt had said on an occasion referred to by St. John: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But here He was speaking, as the Evangelist informs us, of the Temple of His Body. The "*I will destroy*" indeed was altogether gratuitous, for it was the agency of the Jews to which He had attributed the destruction of His body; "Destroy" [ye] "this Temple," and, in speaking of the demolition of the literal Temple to His disciples, He had simply predicted it, without saying that He Himself would accomplish it. Yet no doubt in His words taken literally there had been ground for the charge, while in their real scope and significance there was none whatever. Then, finally, the demeanour of Stephen, which made his enemies momentarily recoil, had found its counterpart in our Lord. When with meek and dauntless demeanour He went forth to meet His captors, and took up in His mouth, in answer to their inquiry for Jesus of Nazareth, the designation of the most High God, "I AM," they quailed for a little moment beneath the self-possession and majesty of His mien—"as soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground." It was the thorough interpenetration of Stephen's mind by the Spirit of his Master, and the reflection of his mind in his features, which produced in his case similar panic. The presiding judge himself is thrown back by the prisoner's mien, and asks, with a tameness which strangely contrasts with the general vehemence of the proceedings, "Are these things so?"

We can easily conceive that, to Stephen's mind, the consciousness of this providential conformity to his Master's image was the greatest possible source of consolation, nay, was perhaps the secret of that supernatural joy which radiated from his countenance. "Against Him, too, they were infuriated; they dragged Him, too, before this court; against Him, too, they set up false witnesses; this experience of the malignity of men and devils, He knows it all, He sees it all, He sympathises with it all; I am following hard in His footsteps; He is drawing me after Him through the Red Sea of blood and suffering, and I shall emerge by and by on yonder heavenly shore, whither my enemies can no more follow me than Pharaoh's host could follow the children of Israel, to sing my hallelujahs

to Him for His Grace." It is almost impossible but that some such thoughts as these must have flashed through Stephen's mind at his arraignment, and these must have been the thoughts which lit up his countenance with such an illumination, and made his features a transparency. The Spirit of which we are told that he was full, took hold of the facts of his experience, and used them as a most comfortable and joyous assurance of the glory which should follow, according to that word, written long after by one of his persecutors, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."

The application to ourselves is summed up in the words of another Apostle: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

"Think it not strange"; do not account it alien or foreign to the usual experience of Christians; it is the normal state of things; it is a compliance with, not a departure from, the ordinary law. If the Captain of our Salvation could only be made perfect through suffering, let not the soldiers in His army claim to be exempt from the operation of the same law. The cross, in one or other of the many shapes in which it may be laid upon us, is the essential note of a Christian, and a discipline necessary to prepare us for the crown; and therefore, when the cross is laid upon us, we should rejoice, as Stephen did in the present resemblance which is thus established between us and our Master, and in the prospect of future conformity which that present resemblance guarantees. And let me add, that the more fiery our trial is, the closer is the providential conformity with Christ which it establishes, and the spiritual conformity with Christ which it holds out the means of attaining. *His* trial was an *overwhelming* one. Its mysterious anguish wrung from His frame great drops of blood, and drained from His human spirit every drop of consolation. Such extreme anguish was made necessary in His case by the work of atonement, which He had in hand; and the God Who "afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men," never envelops His merely human children in such total darkness. But, it may be said, that the more crushing a man's afflictions, the more sweeping his calamities, the more is he assimilated in circumstances to Christ. Are you racked with severe bodily pain? Are you deprived of the solace of human sympathy? Is your mind clouded over with doubts and fears, doubts of your own acceptance or of God's love, fears of death, or judgment, or God's displeasure? Or is it paralysed for prayer, stupid and dull in spiritual exercises, and apparently wanting in all spiritual sensibility? These are sore trials, but Christ bore the like of them all, so far as they could be borne by the holy, harmless, and undefiled One; and they are part of the discipline which is to bring you into conformity to Him. Accept them as such. Think that you hear Him saying to you, "Come, take up thy cross, and follow Me." Think that you are Simon the Cyrenian, and that you are required (Oh great dignity and mighty privilege) to help on the loving Lord with His load towards Calvary. Be sure that this particular cross is chosen with reference to your strength and powers of endurance, and that the more painful it is to flesh and blood, the greater is the desire which your Lord expresses for your spiritual conformity to Himself. And His yoke shall be easy to you, and His burden light, and in bearing it you shall find rest to your soul.

Finally, let the supernatural radiance of Stephen's features, caught, as I have observed, from the contemplation of his Master, remind us of the spiritual transfiguration which should be daily proceeding in ourselves. "Be not conformed to this world," says the Apostle, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." And the secret of this moral transformation is disclosed to us in another passage: "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The First Martyr

BY RIGHT REV. J. R. WOODFORD, D.D.

"And all that sat in the council," &c.—Acts vi. 15.

The text delineates the deacon-martyr in the very crisis of his trial. He has been arrested in the midst of his sacred service, and has been falsely accused of the capital offence of blasphemy. The multitude have been stirred up to animosity against him, so as to secure the carrying out of the doom of stoning, if it should be pronounced. As yet he has uttered no word in his own defence. He stands in his youth's freshness before the judgment-seat, while the contest for his life rages around. The angry mob are swarming about him, the false witnesses recite their evidence, and then we read that the judges (they who sat on the council), gazing down at the criminal, are struck with a strange glory in the aspect of the supposed culprit at the bar: "Looking steadfastly upon him, they see his face as it had been the face of an Angel." The language leaves it doubtful whether there was anything supernatural or not in Stephen's appearance. It may have been that the calm repose, nay, more, the triumphant gladness with which we know from history the early martyrs went forth to witness for their Lord, broke forth in a countenance of serenity and joy, which, in the midst of that angry crowd, seemed angelic in its loveliness; or, it may be, that the face of Stephen, like that of Moses, was verily illuminated with a more than natural glory. The spiritual and the corporeal are closely knit together. "All the revelations of God," says a German theologian, "find their last accomplishment in the glorification of the body." The spirit, in its final action, impresses itself upon the flesh; and so perhaps we are to understand, that somewhat of the beauty, which does belong to the body in the resurrection, in that supreme moment of Stephen's earthly existence showed itself before the time. However this be, we may take the verse as delineating, at any rate, the martyr's spiritual independence of the terrible scene around, manifesting a serenity and a nobility which man and man's wrath could not disturb. Let us try to penetrate the secret of that Divine calm of soul, irradiating the very flesh in which the soul dwelt.

I. Religious persecution began with Christianity. This is a simple fact of history. Strange as it may seem, there is no record in earlier times, amid all the cruelty and reckless disregard of the sacredness of human life, which sullied the annals of the old world, of suffering and death deliberately inflicted on account of religious opinions. Christ's own words are, therefore, most remarkable, as indicating a Divine foreknowledge: "They will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake. Brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents,

and cause them to be put to death. The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." When in these words Jesus Christ unfolded the whole system of religious persecution, and declared that it was what His disciples would have to meet, He described what the world's history had hitherto never known. His words were, therefore, a prophecy of a most remarkable kind, for they declared that a new motive, new passions and principles, were about to be awakened by the Faith which He taught. To us who come after, and who know the reception of the Apostles and first Christians at the hand of both heathen and Jew, Christ's language presents nothing remarkable; but place yourselves at His side, before the sword of the persecutor had ever been unsheathed, and you will realise better what a wonderful prevision of things to come He manifested when He thus spoke.

The persecution of Stephen was the first manifestation of this spirit of religious intolerance. Hence the momentousness of the crisis. The indictment of Stephen was the turning-point in the history of Christendom and that foe of the Word. Hitherto the disciples and their following had been treated with contempt. They formed, in the eyes of the Roman governors and the Jewish elders, a miserable sect, which a slight exercise of severity would easily extinguish. "When they had further threatened them they let them go." The mingled dislike and contempt of the magistrates of the people is here expressed. Shortly after we read that they began to "doubt whereunto this would grow." Still it was scarcely anticipated that there could be any prolonged resistance on the part of the followers of the Crucified. Martyrdom, in the strict sense of the word, was an unknown thing when Stephen stood up before the council. In him the terrible prophecy of his Lord began to be fulfilled. If he had failed in that trial, humanly speaking, Christianity would have failed. Had he recanted under fear of the stoning, the faith of the infant Church would have been shaken. Belief in Jesus Christ would have been felt to be not a religious creed, but a philosophical speculation—a theory, an idea. On the other hand, Stephen's boldness, that calm, high bearing, that face irradiated as an Angel's, rejoicing in danger and death for the Master's sake, rooted the Christian Church as a living power in the earth. The world and the Church had confronted each other. It was no longer a question from that first martyrdom whether the creed of Jesus Christ would fade out or endure. And this being so, it was further remarkable that he upon whose firmness all appeared to rest was not one of the original followers of Christ, not an Apostle, but a young man belonging, as it were, to the second generation of believers. Did Stephen realise all this—that for a brief hour the world's destinies had rested with him? It may be so; and hence, in the consciousness of that high calling, his face was seen as the face of an Angel.

There is not one here who has not been, or may not look to be, at some period of his life in a position analogous to that of Stephen. Have you never stood face to face with some stern trial of your sobriety, your truth, your purity, your integrity? Have you never been in company where the honour of God and God's Law was for a moment in your keeping? when it rested with you whether sin should be committed or cast out? whether a high and holy course should be taken, or a mean and false and debasing principle adopted? It may come upon you at any turn—that sifting time; evil inclinations, evil associates, drawing one way, the simple truth of God swaying you towards the opposite. How will you bear yourselves in that trial-hour? Indeed, it is the characteristic of Christianity that the motive-power is the same for the loftiest and the most insignificant, the same in great things and in small. The soul that shall preserve its integrity under the common-place trials of our everyday life must be animated

by the same sense of responsibility to God, the same consciousness of a high and holy calling, the same vivid perception of the nearness and sympathy of a Living Lord, the same resolution in His strength to bear all things, and to be faithful unto death, which cast about Stephen an unearthly glory, so that as he stood before his enemies a more than mortal presence seemed manifested in him.

II. Again, there is much to be noted in the Providence of God with regard to Stephen. The chapter before us dwells emphatically upon the singular power of his ministry: "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." He is an instance of the gift of miracle-working conferred by the Apostles upon their converts. "There arose certain disputing with Stephen, and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." He was, that is, a man endowed with great intellectual capacity. Yet this ministry, full of such mighty promise, was cut short at the very outset. What, we imagine, might have been the triumphs of the Cross if Stephen had been spared to bear it longer! We know the vast impetus which was given to the Gospel by the genius of St. Paul. What if St. Paul had been associated with one like Stephen in his missionary work? Yet, in the mystery of the Divine counsels, it might not be; and Stephen must fall asleep without a single Church claiming him as its founder. Was there, then, a waste of power in that early cutting short of the martyred deacon in the midst of his days? was it premature—that dying under the stony shower in the streets of Jerusalem? Not so. It may well teach us two lessons.

1. The power of a short life. Who has not known instances of the sudden dropping into the grave of some gifted intellect, some character of more than common loveliness and promise? The mourners, as they go about the streets speak of what might have been if a few more years had been granted. Has, then, the soul been summoned home too soon? Has the holder of the keys of death been hasty in unlocking the iron door? Nay; may it not be said, even by us who see so short a way into the future, that, like the Hebrew hero such have been mightier in their death than their life? The short span has been stamped by the early death with its power of influence, of persuasiveness; yea, death hath sometimes first opened our eyes to the saintliness of the departed one. The memory of Stephen may have been more to the Church of the First-born than Stephen's protracted ministry.

2. And there is a further teaching still. Was Stephen content to die at the beginning of the race? Was it the destiny measured out to him by Infinite Wisdom to see nothing of the uprising of the Christian Church; to know nothing of the preaching of his Master's name to the Gentiles? Then do we learn not to be impatient ourselves to behold a completed work; to be willing to lay the foundations, and leave to others to bring forth the topstone with joy—willing ourselves to sow the seed and let other hands gather in the harvest.

The Angel-Face on Man

BY REV. A. RALEIGH, D.D.

"As it had been the face of an Angel."—Acts vi. 15.

I think we may say that there are certain things *common* to the Angel-face on man amid all the endless variety of type and form; certain things which we may look for (with at least but little exception) on *all* the faces which carry on them any image or resemblance to higher worlds and holier

creatures. And by the mention of these we shall make the subject quite practical.

I. **BRIGHTNESS.** We cannot be wrong in supposing that there was something luminous on the face of Stephen which was seen by those who "looked steadfastly" on him. Some hovering splendour, or some more nettled halo. As we say, "a light upon the face." We always associate brightness with the Angels, and their appearances. If they come like common men, wearing humanity for disguise (as they did to Abraham on the plain), the veiled brightness soon begins to shine through. If they come in their own nature, and proper state, then "the countenance is like lightning, and the raiment white as snow." If Stephen's countenance had been dull or sad on that day, this in the text had never been recorded of him. Why should any man wear darkness or heaviness on his face? There is something in the world which we may learn, there is something from God which we may have, that will change all to brightness. Not indeed to brightness such as the Angels above live in and continually behold. There are some things to weep over; there are many things to fear. This is a world of cloud and shadow. But the heaven in which the cloud floats is larger than the cloud, and all full of light. Shadows are melting things, and even while they continue, the very fact that they are *seen* to be shadows argues the presence and prevalence of a superior light. The true philosophy of life is this—to get the light within ourselves—the light of God, for without that all must be dark; and then to get the habit of looking for and seeing the light everywhere, according to that profound and beautiful Scripture, "In Thy light shall we see light." If I know that I have a Father in Heaven Who watches over all His children, and over me among them, Who forgives while He condemns my sin, Who strengthens the purpose of goodness in my heart by immediate touches and inspirations of His Holy Spirit, Who provides for all my need, Who cares for me in all my cares, Who leads me and guides me, all blind and sorrowful as I sometimes am, in an everlasting way; and if I also know that He is the Father of the world, and holds it in constant rule and in constant training, leading it on through rainy days and wintry weather to the summer that is coming; if I know that He hates all the world's vileness and yet pities its miseries, and rules everything for its ultimate good, which He has bound Himself by word, and oath, and covenant to secure—then why should I be sad? If it be true that there are foreshadows of evil which will certainly come, it is yet more true that there are foreshadows of good which will as certainly come, and come not to flicker for moments, but to stay for ages, and even for evermore. Therefore I will not go into the caves where the doubting dwell, and where the fearful mutter their apprehensions, and where the wilfully sorrowful cherish their miseries. I will walk the open plain where light shines, although often chequered with shadows, and set face to the upward way, although passing storms sometimes hide it from view. Since I may, I will wear the Angel-look of cheerfulness and live in the light of God.

II. **CALMNESS.** Stephen was preternaturally calm; and calm in a scene of the utmost excitement. "What matters it?" he seems to have thought. "I have spoken the truth. I will speak it again if I may, and, by God's help, so keep my spirit in the truth, that all this turbulence and commotion shall remain outside of me, while I possess my soul in patience, and breathe in the serenity of the Angels." The test of a man's soul-state is often thus made very practical in life. He is tried by the pressure of the hour, and by the hurry of the happening events, sometimes even more than by the general aspect of affairs. And it is not enough to have a general cheerfulness as the result of a survey

of life and the world on the whole. There must be superiority to particular disquietudes, and a keeping of the heart in the stillness of grace, in the great and deep peace of God, in the very presence of any immediate agitations. It need not be disguised that this is sometimes a matter of supreme difficulty. *Present* things and living men are so powerful, especially when they are heated and eager! To be calm when the atmosphere of the time and place is at fever heat, and the passions of others around are in full play, seems almost like being inhuman. No; not *inhuman*, but *superhuman*; Christlike; gracious. And no one can hope to get the Angel-face who furrows and flushes his own with daily excitements, and yields without a struggle to particular temptations in the hope that a general obedience will get him through. The peace of God is to *keep* the heart and mind as a garrison is kept. Surely "the helmet of salvation" should keep the head cool and quiet. The very feet should be "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." "Stand therefore," as Stephen stood—when anger burns, when falsehood lies, when cupidity grasps the shining dust, when pleasure sings that you may dance, when earth is magnified, when Heaven is slighted. Look above, look beyond. Bring Heaven the nearer, and dwell in its eternal calm while these fretful present things flow by.

III. **BENIGNITY** shone out in that wonderful arresting face. Without this there could be no resemblance to God Himself or to His dear Son, This is the one thing which, less than anything else, could be absent. This is the family likeness. For "God is love," and if He *could* assume any visible form, love and kindness would shine conspicuously there. And God so loved the world that He gave His Son, Who, in being His Son, is also love; and all who become children necessarily wear the image. And he that loveth not is not of God, and cannot wear an Angel-face. But those who, like Stephen, learn the lesson at the feet of Christ, and practise it among men—even among those who have no answering affection, even in the presence of their enemies—those who return good for evil, and love for hatred, who forgive all who trespass against them, as they are themselves forgiven of God, and seek the salvation of souls as men seek gold—they put on the image of the heavenly, they look like their brothers of the upper Kingdom, they look like what they are—the children of the King!

IV. **FEARLESSNESS.** A faithful fearlessness to truth and duty, without regard to any present personal consequences. In Stephen's case those consequences were most threatening. Indeed, they proved to be what we call "*fatal*." But in the nomenclature of Heaven *fatal* sometimes means *vital*. To the cowardly life is death. To the fearless, death is life. Not that that issue hangs near us usually in ordinary life as the result of obedience. Courage often means safety, escape from petty annoyances and molestations, and entrance openly upon a wider and freer way. And in the highest sense it *always* means safety. He is safe who, on just grounds, can respect himself, who feels that he is bearing witness to the truth, who gives no place to traitorous suggestions of compliance for comfort's sake, who refuses to bend his spirit to the rule of circumstances, or to take moral law of guidance from "society," who although he never wishes, often dares to be peculiar, who subjects the present to the future, and holds this vain world and this fleeting time cheap, in comparison with grander worlds and everlasting duration. If an Angel *were* here, to live for a while the life of a man, you would see what it is to be brave. You would see him pass through sorrows smiling, his heart borne up already with foretaste of the after-joy. You would see how easy it would be to make what we call "sacrifices," and how they would all be entered in his life-book as so many advantages gained. You would see how little he would care for the murmurings of men, for the stirrings

up of the people by this or that, for threat, defiance, death itself. The death-gate would be to him a very goal, by entering which he would regain life for evermore. Now all this is just what you may be. The celestial courage is attainable in terrestrial scenes, if not perfectly yet in large measure, and those who attain it will, by so much more, put on celestial resemblance, and look on human scenes, as it were, with the face of an Angel.

V. HE WHO WOULD HAVE THE ANGEL-FACE MUST LOOK HIGH AND FAR. He must learn to look not so much *at* things, as *through* them, to see what is in them, and what is beyond. In a little while Stephen "looked steadfastly up into Heaven." There is a look for a mortal man to give! A look which in his case was well rewarded, for "he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the Right Hand of God. And said, Behold! I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God!" And that look gave him final victory. Men were gnashing their teeth beside him, and stopping their ears against his words, and crying with loud voice, and rushing upon him with one accord, to bear him away on the angry flood of their passion, to a violent death. They did not know that to him the pains of death were over. He was already dead in spirit. He had "looked" himself into Heaven. He had entered yonder gate of jasper. He had trodden the streets of gold. In a moment he had gone beyond all starry splendours into God's pure glory, and had heard the rewarding welcome from the Saviour's lips. But this was not the first time he had looked into Heaven. Ever since he became a believer he had been looking that way, and after Jesus had left them and gone thither he had scarce looked any other way. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth"—where Christ sometimes *standeth*, as to Stephen, in token of all needful help-giving to those who look.

"Things above!" You find them everywhere—in daily duties, in commonest things—but it needs the Angel-eye to see them. Always look within, look through, look above, look beyond, look far on. Be an Angel, or be a child in this; for the little child is not unlike the Angel in its looking. Did you never see it on the little face—that calm, dreamy, distant look? that pierces quite through *your* world, and transcends all your ideas of prudence, and care, and duty, with a sublime indifference which is none the less grand that it is so simple. Of course a child cannot be said to have an Angel's thought. It has not even a man's. Yet in some respects the child is nearer the spiritual world than the man is. It is more than a poetic fancy that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." Children come out of the Kingdom of Heaven. They come from God, Who is the centre and glory of that Kingdom, and, all unconsciously, they behave themselves as those who are not yet far from home. They are in the fields nearest the house. By the least hint or suggestion they will look back to the door, and even think it not impossible to go in. They believe what they are told. Words of God, Angel-visits, ghosts, wonders—all are taken *literally*. They have no difficulty in believing. The difficulty comes, alas! but too soon. The dream-like glory and freshness of the morning time fade away. The world becomes all materialism. Knowledge lords it over faith. Experiences destroy simplicity; and amid the dust and hurry of secular things the wonders of eternity are veiled and hidden, as the great snow-mountains are often covered with mist and cloud. Then at night often (happy they to whom it is so) comes a clearing time. The true day begins to break at sunset, and the shadows flee away. Then the old child-faith comes back, but in a higher form. Then it is found that matter is the shadow and spirit is the substance. The soul begins to look through, to look high and far, and on the dying beds, and in departing hours, you find

again the child-look—the Angel-look—on the face of the mortal man who is just putting on immortality. But although this is a sketch but too faithful of the course of many a life, it is not the course we are intended to run. It is not intended surely that we should lose the battle of manhood, or wage it doubtfully, because, through divine grace, we *may* collect our forces and calmly retire into eternal safety at the last. It is intended that we should be victorious all the way, that we should *walk* by faith and not by sight, that we should pierce through disguises, and blow away the thick delusions of life with spirit-breath, as the north wind clears the sky, and “look” with Angel-face, “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

VI. HOW ALL THIS MAY BE—HOW WE MAY WEAR THE ANGEL-FACE AMONG MEN. Of course it is quite vain to attempt to put it on directly, and by mental intention, as a soldier puts on his armour, or a king his royal robe. To put the matter plainly, could anything more absurd be conceived than this; that a man should say—“Now I am going to look like an Angel!” If he is not like the Angels, he never can *look* like them. If he has not got something of the Angel-soul, he never can wear the Angel-face. You may think that the subject of this meditation is a kind of outward superficial subject—not more than a branch of the fine arts of religion. It is really intensely inward and spiritual. It points to a state of things within, so clear, and strong, and spiritually vital, as to affect the outward appearance, and find there perpetual expression. Facial brightness, if you have it—and you may have it with any kind of features, plain, rugged, storm-beat; sunshine is nowhere more beautiful than on rough rocks—what is it but an overflowing from the light of God within? Calmness on the countenance is index to peace in the soul. Benignity appearing in the features is the flushing out of indwelling love. And so of each particular trait. Never mind the face. Forget if you will that you *have* a face. I believe one face is just as good as another, or almost as good, for the expression of divine sentiment and emotion. Keep soul-brightness, and the smile will, someway, ripple through. Keep soul-peace, and fear or misery will not settle on your face. Steel your heart with heroic purpose, and you will never go with bloodless lips and coward eye. Love God with heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and your neighbour as yourself, and you will never need to think of putting up a face-advertisement of what will be found within. The poor will bless you, and the fallen will look up in your face, as they looked in the face of Christ, and see pity and help written there; and the children will play about your knee, and the very dogs will come to eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. But don't think about the face itself. If you try to put any particular emotion into the features, it will not be surprising if the very opposite emotion should come instead. Try to look grand, and you may make yourself little. Try to look innocent, and (although you may not remember a single sin) the general consciousness of guilt may seize you and put its colour into your face. Have the Angel within, and leave all else to come as it will. Or, as we have it in the context, and in the case of Stephen, be “full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost,” *i.e.*, be a Christian man, through and through, in belief and practice among fellow-disciples, among worldly people, and the Lord your God will put His “beauty” on you, in one or other of its many forms, and in some supreme moments of life, in suffering, in trial, in death, may give your friends beholding you the privilege and joy of looking as it were upon the face of an Angel.

Character seen in the Face

BY REV. A. H. WASHBURN, D.D.

"As it had been the face of an Angel."—Acts vi. 15.

There is a natural effect of the states of the soul upon the countenance, which gradually progresses, and which amounts in a life-time to a transfiguration. The infant has no expression in its face of good or evil, because it feels no good or evil. As it grows into childhood there is little to be read there, save sometimes an inherited grossness of feature moulded by ancestral brutishness, or some lines of spiritual or intellectual expression that come down from the father and the father's father. Otherwise all is blank—the unspotted sheet on which any characters of exquisite beauty, or unseemly blots, may be thereafter marked. But as life progresses every deed seems to be written on the face. See how it is in a life of vice. Evil passions and evil deeds trace the course of lines which are to be the handwriting of sin; and every crime deepens a little those lines, and every bad thought extends them further. Impurity within seems to impart an impure look to the surface. Beastliness of habit makes a beastly face. Hatred and revenge ossify the features to their own hardness. Drunkenness puffs up the drunkard's bloated face, and lust leaves the impression of her own wanness. And so among men you can, with some skill, read as you look upon them the sins of each. It is a language and handwriting which must be learned. But if you have learned it, you will translate from the lines of one avarice, greed, and the love of money; in another fierce passions, uncontrolled and governing the whole nature; in another lust; in another brutish degradation; in another the utter want of all social and domestic goodness. You see that the young have not written these characters on themselves so plainly as yet—they are hardly legible, and that age has imprinted them as indelibly as if they were carved in the rock. Then you go to some prison where the basest of men are congregated, and you see sin so deeply engraved on every face that you almost doubt whether they can be human beings who stand before you, so brutish are the brows and lips, so expressionless or so serpent-like the eyes, so earthly the whole cast and colour. And this is the transfiguration of vice. It is so perfect that there need be no other book of record for men than that which they write themselves upon themselves. That prepares them to die, and carry into the grave the story of their lives, and to appear to judgment with the involuntary and forced confession moulded in their very image. Did Cain bear a mark on his forehead? It was the type or prediction of the thousands of marked brows which at the judgment shall require no testimony, and no sentence of the Judge, but shall to all beholders proclaim the sinfulness and the punishment.

Do we often enough think of this, and that it requires not great crimes to debase the features of the form divine, but that what we call little sins are just as surely day by day leaving their imprint? We suffer anger to possess us, and think that when it has passed we shall be the same. We cherish impure thoughts, supposing that they will in no way permanently affect us. We deceive our fellows without a thought that "hypocrite" will be written in our faces. How often are these said to be little things which will be like stains upon the hands, easily washed away. But there is truth as well as figure in the thought that blood of murder will not wash from the palm, and an equal truth that our so-called little faults, too, do daily stain and mould our countenances. Take care, then, of the inward impurity, that it may not come to it, that not only

God Who reads the heart, but men also who read the face may see the wrong of a wrong life by its marks. Think more of the transfiguration of vice. And of virtue, too. This also is a change which may progress from a very early age, even the earliest at which moral character can exist. For the thoughts of goodness make a good and frank brow, and a gentle spirit smooths the features. As it has often been noticed that intellectual pursuits create an intellectual look and bearing—as by studies the form of the head and the features and even the bearing of the body are refined—so is it in regard to the spiritual nature also. And we have often seen the good man's goodness written upon his outward appearance, and his purity of heart, like a subtle ether, penetrating through until it has surrounded him with a kind of atmosphere and sat upon his head like an halo. Have you not seen it? gentleness on the brow; calmness and purpose in the eye; purity of heart on the lips; temperance stamped on the features; the love of man in every gesture; and love and faith toward God in the air and expression. It is seen more in the aged, for it is a change which grows through long years. It grows sooner in such as have borne pain and sorrow, since they are the native soil of virtue. But it is, more or less, in all who live good lives. It is the mark by which God marks His beloved. It is the transfiguration of virtue.

And it, too, is an evident preparation for the judgment or life to come. For it is written by ourselves—our own handwriting on the white page in which we come to this world clothed, our own signature which we shall carry when we go hence. And shall we fail to write this lovely record as we live here?—by faith marking on ourselves the graceful letters of faith; by brotherly kindness writing it on our face; by excellent and passionless emotions smoothing our brows; by holy love illuminating the beauteous margin of the whole manuscript, by patience and pain providing the border of glory which shall appear in the white hairs which are, in the good, a crown of glory. Ah, it is ours to grow more and more heavenly in visage, if we will; to pass life always regaining the lost image of God; to descend to its close with the gray head, like the already coming “dawn of a better life”; to rise at the last day with God's seal of baptism made a visible stamp on every feature by our daily fulfilment of baptismal vows. Holy Eucharists will furnish the food to such growth, and goodness will seize and assimilate it. God will perfect it. The hand of God's Spirit will mould it into the form and stature of the perfect man.

How does it all impress on us the folly of the thought that we can safely put off a holy life until near the end of life. We are more readily convinced by that which we can see than of that which is spiritual and unseen. So let us learn by our thoughts of the outward form something of the inward state. If a long good life is thus requisite for moulding the virtuous face, is it not equally requisite for real growth in grace? Surely, if vice and virtue do thus stamp themselves upon the features, a man cannot for long years let avarice pinch his features and passions deform them, and then in a short time expect God's Spirit to paint upon them the beauty of goodness. Such a miracle as appeared in the martyr Stephen comes not in these days. Now, only years of a good training, and that begun in the years of youth, can so transfigure the outward man that the face shall seem like the face of an Angel. And is it not just so in regard to the unseen soul? Its sanctification shall be a slow progress. The evil spirits against which we strive are slowly to be killed and drawn forth; and the good that shall be unto life will be slowly planted and nourished. Begin early. Lose no moment. Let the work of the Holy Ghost, and the eating of the dear Lord's Body, and the strifes of assisting Angels, have all the time you have to live here, if you will die with a sanctified heart and beautified visage.

The end will well repay the strife. For it were better for the saint even to die young and have the glow of Heaven on his face, and see his Lord on the right hand of God, and say in raptures, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," than a long life would have been, even crowned with all worldly prosperity. So with us. Say that we shall lose ambition. Say that we renounce wealth; that we sacrifice the world: that we have not the fever or the thrill of pleasure that comes from passions gratified. But a virtuous life will nourish the quiet and calm happiness which shall mould the spirit and fashion the face into inward and outward beauty. We shall commune with the Lord, and every thought of Him shall soften the lines of passion. We shall eat and drink at His Table, and the holy calm of the Altar shall be in our spirits and in our faces, too, as we leave the chancel. We shall, as we go about doing good, grow pure in heart and becoming in appearance. As we overcome our love of money, and give our coveted goods to our Lord, He will efface from our countenances something of the pinched feature of avarice.

In all our lives, as He sees we need, troubles will soften us, afflictions will break the rough angles, holy joys will soothe, the comfort of the Comforter give holy calm, the Church will lend her never ending beauties, sacraments will nourish by their ministrations of grace. With spirits sanctified we shall descend to the valley in which His rod and staff will support. But that is not all. As we see Heaven opened, the eyes will glow with heavenly fire; the brow will have already the adornment of celestial beauty; the soul will speak in all the features, and all who look will see the face like the face of an Angel. And so shall the moment of greatest earthly pain be the moment of our transfiguration.

Who would not live the life of the righteous, to win the beauty of the body celestial? And who that loves beauty would not have comeliness of spirit, that it may bring the comeliness of the face shining brighter than gold in the wealth of goodness?

Ah, these two things shall make the glory of the company of the redeemed at their last glorious assemblage. For beauty is such a divine thing that that will be the Divine Presence where all shall be beauty: the beauty of God's Throne; of Him Who sitteth on the right hand; of Heaven's ritual of worship; of the assembly of the glorious Church, which, if seen aright, begins here on earth to put on her beautiful garments; and in us the beauty of redeemed sinless spirits, and of the celestial and glorified body. Ah, if you love that which is beautiful, reflect on such scenes to come, and strive now in yourselves to reflect something of its brightness. And have no joy in the ugliness of worldly ways, but joying in the beautiful world which is the work of God's hand, and in the beautiful Church and Gospel which His Son has made, put on His image, and make ready to stand when the face of His redeemed shall be like in beauty to the faces of His Angels.

The Face of an Angel

BY REV. DAVID WRIGHT, M.A.

"As it had been the face of an Angel."—Acts vi. 15.

We do not know much about the Angels. But that which does seem to be told us about them is that they are always looking upon the face of God, that the Divine Presence is to their own consciousness in the midst of them, and so that the face of the Angel reflects the Divine Presence. It was this likeness

which was seen upon the face of St. Stephen. From whom, shall we suppose, did the writer of this history learn this fact?

It seems like the account of an eye-witness given by word of mouth to one who had not been there. We surely trace at once the source of this testimony. There was one—he was not himself a member of the council, but he was a disciple of perhaps the most eminent among them—and a place of privilege would, no doubt, be given to him within the chamber of assembly. Many years after these events we find this man saying, “When the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.” Here was St. Luke’s authority (we do not doubt) for all that he tells us about Stephen. As time went on those two men, St. Luke and St. Paul, became the closest and dearest of friends. They traversed the great distances together. In the trials and dangers of his life Luke, the beloved physician, was fast by the Apostle’s side. When the end came at length, “Only Luke,” he said, “is with me.” It was Paul who told to Luke all the things about Stephen. But his name was not Paul in the days of Stephen; his name then was Saul. And the glance which shot from the eye of Saul as the martyr rose to defend himself told of the raging fire of hatred which burned within him. But the change was near. This man was very soon to believe what Stephen believed, and to feel as Stephen felt. The breathing out of threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord was not to last much longer. In the place of this there was soon to come, “To me *to live is Christ*.” And I think that in those happy days, as he talked with the loved companion of his life of the scenes of Stephen’s martyrdom, it would be a marked point of mention specially to be noted when the whole story was told that “all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel.” And what was it which made the face of Stephen like unto the face of an Angel? We shall have to look into the defence which he now makes for an answer to that question: and a truth will rise, or ought to rise, out of this search of ours, and if only by the grace of the Blessed Spirit we may find it, and lay hold upon it, and make it our own, then *our* life will be lifted up and overshadowed with a radiance like that which made Stephen’s face like the face of an Angel.

“Blasphemous words against this holy place and the law”; so the charge rang out. Blasphemy is an ill-sounding word which sometimes means, “*You say about Divine things that which I say is untrue*.” St. Stephen does not deny the charge. As in a charge laid against a greater than Stephen, it had its element of truth. There is no lie so bad as distorted truth. Blunt and flagrant falsehood has less of kindred in it with the heart of him who was a liar from the beginning than the twisted representation of a true thing. “Blasphemous words against this holy place!” Stephen had said many words, not against that holy place, but to His superior honour Who was greater than any holy place, and he says more such words now; and there grows upon his face, as he thus speaks, and because he thus speaks, more and more its likeness to an Angel. Is it not true, as was said at the first, that we know but little about the Angels? But is it not also true, as was then said, that they do always seem to be looking upon the face of God, always saying, as Gabriel said, “I stand in the Presence of God”? And it is this now which Stephen does as he opens the page of the great history and looks upon it. It is to him vitalised through and through by the perpetually realised Presence of the Living God. “This holy place!” And will you shut up God *within* it, O men of this ancient council, and bound His goings forth by the walls of your Temple? Where was Abraham

when the God of glory first appeared to him? In a country many months' journey off the site of this your Temple. The patriarchs sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with Joseph there in Egypt. The bush that burned with fire, and from which that voice came, was in some distant wilderness. "Take off thy shoes from thy feet," for here, in this distant wilderness, "the place where thou standest is holy ground." All this is elementary truth to us. But it was not elementary truth to that Jewish council. The veil was over their spirit of selfish national pride. They listened to the old story. No Jew was ever tired of listening to the old story. But they had never read it thus. They had never seen that this cramping of God within their holy place was at variance with all their grand past; that Israel would never have been Israel if, in holy, blessed, sustaining presence, God had not been everywhere and with all people. "Do not I fill Heaven and earth?" saith the Lord. But Stephen saw this. He was looking evermore into this fact. We read his speech; it might seem to us, if we read it in a cursory way, simply an historical record, bare and a little dry. But consider it more carefully, and you will find it thrilled and quick throughout with the hallowing Presence of the Eternal God, not bound and fettered here or there by the services of a religion or the sanctity of a shrine; but *God* in the land of the Chaldeans; *God* in Egypt, and Midian, and the wilderness; *God* as it were, releasing Himself out of the imprisonment of any earthly habitation, and saying to the man who in his vanity or his superstition would hold Him there, "What house will ye build for Me? and what is the place of My rest?" So Stephen looked over the regions, and as he looked he saw everywhere the face of God. It was this which made his face like the face of an Angel. "Their Angels," Jesus said, speaking of little children—"their Angels do always behold the face of the Father Who is in Heaven." There are those upon this earth who are always beholding the face of the Father Who is in Heaven. Stephen was; and so may we, and catch in this manner the reflection of the Angel's face.

What is that which sours life, and brings so often over it the shadow of a moody sullenness? What is it which darkens the eye and knits the brow, and gives to the voice a tone of grating ill-humour? The causes are many; they spring up on all sides. Let me not attempt the tracing to their sources these movements of irritation; it would be as useless as well as a graceless task. But let me say how it is that we may keep our eye and our brow and our voice unruffled, or at least how the shadow of the moment shall pass off like a summer cloud before the sun. We must be looking always, as Stephen looked, into the face of God. In all the events of life we must see Him. "Full of faith," it is said of Stephen twice, in verses close together, "full of faith." Not in the rainbow only, but in the earthquake and the storm, he saw God; not in life's smooth aspects only, but behind its darkest mysteries, he saw God. The patriarch wandering over the land of promise, but not one foot of it his own; the seed of the patriarch resting under the promise, but evil entreated in the land of the stranger four hundred years; the appointed deliverer all ready for his work, mighty in his words and deeds, but driven from his people and doing humble service long distances off for more than a generation of men; the people released at length, but turning at once as soon as the travel began of that march of mystery—turning to offer sacrifice to the calf which they had made, and to worship the host of heaven. Looking into these things, as he traced the great story, Stephen was looking in them and through them into the face of God. But to him all this, we may say, was history; and it is not difficult for the ordinarily devout man to find the signs of God in the gloomiest past interpreted and explained

by later events. But there was that to St. Stephen which was not history. The speech came to an end, and what came next? His judges gnashed upon him with their teeth, and straightway he was dragged out of the city and there stoned. And while this was going on, did his countenance change? The face as of an Angel, had it left him? Let us take for an answer the words of the—poet

Looking upward full of grace,
He prayed, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.

If it were not the face of an Angel that beholders now saw, it was only that, looking up steadfastly into Heaven, and seeing the glory of the Lord, it was changed into that image. The face as of an Angel was become the face of the glory of the Lord.

For it was not in history only that Stephen saw God. Seeing Him there always, and finding Him everywhere, how should not his eye be fixed on Him in the coming of the Just One as it had never been fixed before? In Joseph's prison Stephen saw God; with clearer vision shall not Stephen see God in Jesus? Let us look into our own life and our own soul. This day passes with its rest, and to-morrow comes with its *business*. In our management of this, whatever form it takes, shall it be with us a very earnest care to shut out avarice, hardness, ill-temper, artifice, or whatsoever else should draw a veil before the face of God, and so take from our work and business the sacred name of duty? And when there comes to us the resting or recreation time—the evenings of the day, or at certain seasons, perhaps, whole days together—shall this be God to us in His loving-kindness and tender care, considering all our need? and shall we jealously shun the levity, the unkind speaking, the injurious reading, the pleasure-worshipping idolatry, or whatsoever besides should forbid to these resting-times the name of God's loving-kindness, and change them into commonplace selfish indulgence? Then it may be that sickness has visited some, and languor weighs them down; or adversity is come in some very trying form, perhaps even sore affliction. Is this to them the Father in chastening love purifying their heart and drawing them to Himself, every bitter thought crushed out that might give to suffering any sources less hallowed than the infinite love of God? Brethren, this is, like Stephen, to be looking always into the face of God, watching for and finding Him everywhere. And the end draws near to us all—the end as it came to Stephen. He saw it coming in the face of his judges. Theirs was not the face of an Angel; they were gnashing with their teeth. At that moment the martyr looked up, and he saw a vision. A strange brightness over the faces of other dying persons besides St. Stephen might lead one to suppose that they had also seen a vision, such as that which he saw. "I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." Everywhere else in Scripture the image of Him is of one that *sitteth* on the right hand—the posture of dignity, repose, and power. Here He is standing, as one prepared to help, the hand of succour and of welcome ready. He is standing. Brethren, may all this life of ours be hidden now with Him in God! So that when to us the last hour is come, we may also—not see, perhaps, in vision as Stephen did—but know in our deepest soul, that there upon the right hand of God, quick to feel with us, strong to rescue, Almighty to save, *stands* the Son of Man.

The Face of an Angel

BY REV. C. H. WRIGHT.

"All that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him," &c. Acts vi. 15.

"Human physiology," says Victor Hugo, "is formed by the conscience and the life, and is the result of a number of mysterious excavations." Sensuality, self-indulgence, lust, leave the smearing touches of their own vileness upon the countenance. There, too, are registered discontent, fretfulness, feverishness of spirit. The envious man cannot conceal his envy. The pose of the chin, the turn of the head, bespeak Miss Disdain and Madame Consequence.

So do the finer qualities show their indices in the body. Noble thoughts carve their majesty in strong lines on the brow. Calmness on the countenance is an index to peace in the soul. Benignity appearing in the features is the flushing out of indwelling love. Just as the loveliness of the earth is the expression of forces operating below the surface, so beautiful souls make illumined faces. The Angel face of Stephen came from his Angel spirit.

The times in which we live are possibly not conducive to the shaping of Angel features. Life is too complex. The rush and strain are too great. Hungry desire, eager ambition, carking care, the pale cast of thought—all these are written, and written so fully that they leave little or no room for the writing of the Angels. Yet in all the ages there have been, there still are, these Angel-faced men. Charles Lamb saw on the countenance of the Quaker ladies something that made them appear as troops of shining ones. The face of John Keats was as the face of one who had seen a vision. Throughout his life he had followed the gleam, and that gleam made his face a face illumined. The artists always paint St. Cecilia with a face glowing with light, as though sunbeams from above had transfigured the face of the sweet singer. And those Angel faces are still to be met with.

I. WHAT ARE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS?

1. The Angel face is the luminous face. Brightness we always associate with Angels. If sometimes they come as wayfaring men with veiled faces, it is not long before the light glints through the veil. "He maketh His Angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." Their countenances are as the lightning and their raiment white as snow. That is hardly to be wondered at. If the countenance of their Lord is as the sun shining in his strength, what wonder that those who stand in His presence drink in the radiance. For forty days only the glory of the Eternal poured upon Moses, but they were sufficient to bathe him in unearthly brightness, so that when he returned to the mountain base his face was as "a face illumined." The waters of the Pacific, it is said, are full of phosphorescent creatures, so that at times the sea looks like a sea of glass, mingled with fire. It is said that a naturalist who on one such occasion bathed in its waters was illumined for hours after. God covers Himself with light as with a garment, and he who lives in God's atmosphere soon becomes luminous. So about the face of Stephen there was a certain radiance, some hovering splendour, some settled halo that men associate with Angels.

2. The Angel face is the serene face. Calmness and tranquillity are characteristic of Angel features. Doing His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word, tranquillity sits on their brow. Emissaries of a larger, loftier universe, viewing all things from a plane from which everything takes on a new

aspect, on their faces the flush and the furrow of daily excitement are never to be seen. Doing the will of God, errands, tasks, ordeals hard and trying have no power to take the calmness from their brows. If it be true that "the outside world takes all its colour, value, grace from the kind of world one carries about in one's self," then the Angels can only be serene. Very different is their tranquillity from that philosophic indifference which simply "accepts the facts," which "submits to the inevitable." The highest peace is not thus to be discovered. Tranquil faces do not come from stoic philosophy. They come only when "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," garrisons the heart. Men full of labour and suffering have still had the look of serenity. A young officer wrote on his slate just before the cancer choked him: "These have been the happiest months I ever spent in my life." So amid the flurried excitement of the council-chamber men saw the face of Stephen serene, as it had been the face of an Angel.

3. The Angel face is the fearless face. Again and again when the Angels came at the behest of their Lord they had one word upon their lips, "Fear not"; and the courage they sought to inspire in others was written in unmistakable lines upon their brows. The spirit of fear is no gift of God. Stephen was a man "full of faith," and faith means the deliverance from fear. He was "full of the Holy Ghost," and the Holy Ghost does not create neutralities. Fearlessness was one of the lines written on the face of Stephen. Men used to say about General Gordon that there was something mysterious in his fearlessness in moments of peril. We know what that "something" was. It was his living, glowing, conquering trust in God. The quiet mastery which was Paul's in the confusion and panic of the storm; the fearlessness that shone on the face of Milton when in reply to the brutal soldier who lifted his sword to slay him, crying, "I have power to kill you," answered, "Yes, and I have power to be killed"; that same fearlessness shone on Stephen's face as he stood before his revilers in the council hall.

II. WHAT ARE THE ARTISTS THAT CHISEL THE FEATURES TO SUCH PERFECTION? Brierley rightly observes that environment has something to do with face architecture. Yes, climate and country, and surroundings and home, these undoubtedly help to shape the features. But one must go deeper than all this. What makes the face is not so much the force without as the force within. The true artists of men's features are men's spirits; keep soul-brightness, and the smile will some way ripple through. Keep soul-peace, and neither fear nor misery will settle on your face. Steel your heart against wrong, and you will never go with a coward's eye. Love God, love man, and you will need no cosmetics, for there is no beautifier comparable to love. Under its influence plain and homely faces are touched into perfection. Live the beautiful life, and the face will take care of its own sweetness. The Angel face of Stephen came from his Angel spirit. He was "full of faith and the Holy Ghost." He was "full of grace and power." They "were not able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke."

1. The spirit of Stephen may be accounted for by Spiritual Communion. Transformation comes by assimilation. "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." It is a known law that we become like those with whom we commune, whom we admire and love. When men lose themselves in God they become like God. We all know that admiration and love can transfigure and transform. Sometimes in those who have loved each other tenderly through long years, so perfect an affinity is set up that thought answers to thought, feature

to feature, voice to voice. If we would have the spirit that shapes the Angel features we must know what it is "to abide in our own room" and "shut to the door." For in these hours of communion and contemplation, fear, sadness, care are done away. The door is opened in Heaven; we get a glimpse into Paradise, and the light from the opened door stamps itself upon our features.

2. It may be accounted for by the upward look. "He looked up steadfastly into Heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the Right Hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." That upward look was the secret of his inspiration. The Divine Epiphany will account for the brightness, the calmness, the majesty of his life. Says Disraeli: "He who does not look up will look down, and the spirit that does not soar is destined perhaps to grovel." The world never needed more than to-day vision, outlook, extended horizons. The Angel faces are few, because men are everywhere looking down. Jewish prophets in older days cried "Look up," "Lift up your eyes on high." Looking down, one catches no glimpse of the blue heavens above; the vision is too circumscribed to see and catch the great light. Looking down, man is robbed of the vision that inspires radiance, calmness, courage; these are the fruits of a lofty and far-reaching vision.

3. Another fashioner of the Angel features in the case of Stephen was trouble, rightly, bravely borne. It was only after the traducers and blasphemers of his character had witnessed against him that the councillors saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel. The ultimate issue of pain, stress, strife in the mind of the Eternal is that it may bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. It is true that men do not always look at it thus. They fret and chafe and are angry under the withering touch of pain. The fit passes, and such men are cynical, morose, bitter. When sufferers have "cheerfully taken the cup," out of weakness they have been made strong. Many a one out of business reverses has brought a new spirit, and eyes quickened to behold the heavenly vision.

Chapter VII.

The Apology of Stephen

FROM "THE CHURCH REVIEW."

"Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"—Acts vii. 1.

The apology of Stephen has been criticised as entering into unnecessary detail and as being bitterly recriminative.

I. He was charged with having said that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses (vi. 14). Now this was true in a certain sense. The falsehood lay in the term "blasphemous," and in the offensive and unexplained manner in which the accusation was made. When wise and discerning men wish to amend legislation and rectify abuses, it is quite true that they endeavour to alter customs which former legislators handed down. The complexion their enemies give to their efforts is that they are revolutionary and hostile to the national institutions. To impeach anyone of altering the laws of Moses was to fix on him the imputation of being irreligious and unpatriotic.

1. The only mode of refutation was by recapitulating the chief wants in the career of the Jewish people. The force of the charge lay in its brevity. This

force could only be removed by expanding it to the full dimensions of the national history, and thus showing that altering the laws of Moses was wrapt in the Divine purpose and comprehended in the mission of Israel. This is the course which Stephen adopts.

2. Moses was not the first nor the principal depository of revelation. It was to Abraham that the land of Canaan was promised, and the conditions of that promise and of the tenure attached to it were never abrogated (5; see Heb. xi. 8-16).

3. The descent into Egypt, though foreseen, was not an integral part of the original design, and consequently the Mosaic covenant was only an incidental and temporary institution (Gal. iii. 16).

4. The temple was a comparatively modern erection, and a time was expressly contemplated when it would cease to be a centre of worship (42-50; see John iv. 23).

5. Moses himself announced that a Prophet would in course of time be raised up among the children of Israel to Whom they must transfer their religion (37; see John v. 46).

Christianity was a reversion to first principles.

II. It was impossible to take this historical retrospect without eliciting the fact that Moses had been rejected by his own contemporaries (27, 39), and that the prophets had been successively persecuted by the generations to whom they preached, and that this habit of infidelity and resistance was the heirloom of the nation, and now culminated in their rejection of Jesus (51-53).

Their zeal for Moses was only a hypocrisy intended to furnish them with a pretext for refusing Christ. In rejecting Christ they in reality rejected Moses, and refused to obey his injunction. In the same way our Lord accuses the Scribes and Pharisees of showing by building the tombs of the prophets that they participated in the crime of those who slew them (Matt. xxiii. 29). Each generation pretends a reverence for great and good men of the past as an excuse for persecuting great and good men of the present. Thus assumed veneration for the olden prophet is a sign that if they lived in his day they would slay him, as they do the prophet of their own day. The zeal of the accusers of Stephen for Moses was only a cloak under which they might slay Stephen.

The censure passed on Stephen by some critics for exasperating his enemies by the method of his defence has often, and in our own day with ever-increasing pointedness, been aimed at the character of Jesus, and so at the vitals of Christianity. It is averred that our Lord used what, if we were speaking of an ordinary man, we should call intemperate language, and provoked His antagonists to extreme measures by the severity of His condemnation. The enemies of Christianity have here a decided advantage, not against Christianity, but against Christians. We have not a word to say in reply to this argument. We are, and have long been, too fond of ease and so-called peace and the friendship of rich and powerful men to lift our voices in reproof of any crime or sin that has been committed in high places. We are ashamed to defend and recommend a duty from the performance of which we have shrunk like cowards. We have forsaken Jesus and left Him alone unfriended, companionless, as when He was on earth, to bear the peltings of this tempest of modern mannerism. But it is on us the blow falls. We have no taste for persecution, we do not wish to be beheaded like the Baptist, nor stoned like Stephen, but above all things we recoil from the reproach of being vulgar or ill-bred. Evil never planted its foundations so firmly as when it succeeded in subordinating truth to fashion.

The words of Stephen were not spoken in anger or malice or unreflecting passion.

They were calmly weighed and deliberately aimed. They were the words of one whose face was as it had been the face of an Angel, and who as he died kneeled down and prayed for his murderers. The past has no memory more precious for us than the deeds and the deaths of such men. They become more precious every day :

He heeded not reviling tones,
Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
Though cursed and scorned, and bruised with stones :

But looking upward, full of grace,
He prayed, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.

St. Stephen's Apology—I.

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken," &c.—Acts vii. 2-16.

Our Blessed Lord had expressly foretold to His Apostles that "men should deliver them up to the councils," Matt. x. 17 (a term which may perhaps include the Sanhedrin, as well as the lesser courts of judicature, of which there were two at Jerusalem, and one in every other town of Palestine). And He had made to them a distinct assurance that in this contingency, so perplexing to unlearned and ignorant men, it should be given them what they should speak ; "for it is not ye that speak," said He, "but the Spirit of your Father Which speaketh in you." St. Stephen was not an Apostle ; but an exactly similar assurance, recorded by St. Luke (xii. 11), had been given to the disciples at large. On the ground of this assurance, we approach St. Stephen's apology with the deepest possible awe and veneration. This speech was unpremeditated ; there was no time for the orator to digest the argument, even had such preparation been allowed by our Lord's words ; for, as we have seen, Stephen had been caught up in a sudden outburst of popular fury, like a vessel at sea by a hurricane. Yet when his speech is deeply studied, there appears in it a wonderful order and method, and a still more wonderful suitability to the occasion, so that we stand aghast at the shallowness of Michaelis's criticism who finds in it a want of oratory ; and still more at that of Erasmus, who says that there are many things in this oration not much bearing on the point which Stephen had it in hand to prove. We assert, on the other hand, that there is a well-defined plan in this speech, though doubtless the fury of the audience prevented its being prosecuted to the end, and that every sentence of it has some deep allusive reference to the points to be proved. If this reference had been more explicit, such was the temper of the court that the defendant would not have been suffered to proceed even so far as he did. We feel that, in virtue of Christ's promise above quoted, the whole oration, though not without its tangles and difficulties, burns and glows with the fire of Inspiration ; and we look upon it as Moses looked upon the burning thorn in the wilderness, dreading to say that the words which were given to Stephen in that hour were not the most suitable which could have fallen from his mouth.

This speech is valuable not only from what it contains, but also as throwing light upon that perplexed question, What is Inspiration ? It will be observed by an attentive reader that in one or two places St. Stephen, quoting the Old

Testament from memory, mixes together (though in such a manner as in no wise to affect his argument) separate incidents. Thus he speaks of Jacob as having been buried in *Sychem*, whereas the Book of Genesis makes the cave of the field of Machpelah his burying-place. The sons of Jacob were, according to Jewish traditions, buried in Sychem; and Stephen, mentioning in one breath the death and burial both of the father and sons, overlooks the fact that the father was buried elsewhere. Again, he speaks of Abraham as buying ground in Sychem of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem. This purchase was really transacted by Jacob, Abraham's purchase having been the cave of Machpelah, in another part of the country; but in so rapid a summary the speaker very naturally blends the two incidents into one, so as to give the appearance of historical inaccuracy. These features of the address, while they do not in the slightest degree affect the argument, or detract from its conclusiveness, serve to show two important points—one, that even the highest form of Inspiration is not dictation; that the human mind (with its ordinary faculties of memory, imagination, and reasoning) is called into play, and not merely the pen or the organs of speech; and the other, that the highest form of Inspiration consists with such apparent inaccuracies as do not in the least affect the ideas which have to be conveyed, or the great scope of the passage. "The Kingdom of God," says the Apostle, "is not in word, but in power." And we may say the same of Inspiration. It does not reside in the mere outward expression, but in the idea expressed, which, being God's idea, not man's, must be forcible, must be eloquent, must be cogent, when by the Holy Spirit's power it is brought into contact with the human mind. Let us beware of that false reverence for the Holy Scriptures called Bibliolatry, or Bible worship, which, like all false reverence, is sure to engender (by a natural reaction) gross irreverence. The pernicious rationalism of the day, which represents the Bible as the expression of devout human reason, as the product not of God's mind, but of man's, and thus degrades this blessed Book to the level of an ordinary work of piety, is partly owing to the circumstance of Christians having surrounded the Bible with a superstitious or false reverence, and having made claims for the Bible which the Bible never makes for itself.

This defence of St. Stephen's, like every work of the Divine Spirit, is many-sided, and has several aspects. We may discriminate in it three great purposes, which run through its whole contexture, and which, like three long strings in a twisted rope, are firmly plaited together. One of Stephen's objects (although it is a subordinate one) is to defend himself from the charge brought against him of blaspheming the Temple and the Law. He is a defendant, speaking in his own defence. And in his way of conducting his defence his wisdom is transparent. Another (and more prominent) object was to show that the reverence with which his antagonists surrounded the Temple and the Law was false and superstitious, and had really no foundation in their own Scriptures. He is a controversialist as well as a defendant, and re-echoes before the authorities of his nation the controversial arguments which he had hitherto employed in the Hellenist synagogues. And in his way of conducting controversy, not his wisdom only, but his truth in avowing his own convictions, is transparent. A third object, though not so fully developed as the two former, was to teach Christian Doctrine. The overthrow of his controversial adversaries, in which he had hitherto been so successful, was nothing to him if he could not at the same time win for the truth an entrance into their minds. He appears not simply as a defendant and a controversialist, but also as a preacher; and his address bursts at every pore, not indeed with explicit statements of Christian

doctrine (which would not have been tolerated), but with allusive references to Christ. Only once is Christ mentioned in it, and then not as the Saviour, but as the Just One; but the speaker's mind is evidently full of Christ, and if you observe him closely you will see that he is always glancing in the direction of the persecuted, rejected, and yet exalted and glorified Saviour. And by glances love is often shown. Stephen's mental glances at the Saviour show intense love to the Saviour, and love to souls, for which the Saviour died.

The three elements in Stephen's speech, apologetic, controversial (or polemical), and didactic, correspond well to the periods of Church History. First comes the apologetic period, when the Church was thrown on her defence against Jews and Gentiles. To this period are to be referred the apologies of Justin Martyr and Tertullian. This period was succeeded by one of controversy, during which the Church was in antagonism, not to heathens or Jews, who avowedly denied, but to heretics and traitors in the camp, who sought to corrupt her doctrine. Then came the age of systematic Theology, when the Christian Creed, having been fully developed by the controversies of the preceding era, was, in all its completeness, definitely taught by the Church.

I will now take that portion of the speech which stands at the head of this Lecture, and give a free paraphrase of it, detaching the apologetic, controversial, and didactic elements, and presenting them separately to the hearer, and expanding the insinuations of St. Stephen in a way which he dared not do, lest his mouth should have been (as indeed it was at last) prematurely closed.

I. APOLOGETIC. "Brethren of my own age and station, and you grave and reverend seniors of the Council, this charge represents me as undervaluing the traditions of our national history. I shall best rebut it, then, by running over the chief points of that history, and avowing my firm and full belief of them. I believe, with you, that the glorious God appeared to the great ancestor of our race; that He called him miraculously, and drew him, by one or two stages into the land which you now inhabit. I believe that He made a promise to him of this land—a promise, however, which was accompanied with an intimation that it should not be fulfilled for a long period of years, during which his seed should dwell in a Gentile country. I believe, also, that God instituted the Sacrament of Circumcision, by which I and all that hear me were admitted into covenant with Him on the eighth day after our birth. I believe that this covenant and promise of God travelled down in the line of the patriarchs from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, and from Jacob to the founders of our twelve tribes. And, finally, I believe that these patriarchs were transported, after their death, into this favoured land, and that their bones lie among us."

II. CONTROVERSIAL. "But you will remember that the facts I have recited imply that Abraham was originally a foreigner, when he received God's call, and that before the institution of the legal Sacrament of Circumcision, and his formal entrance thereby into covenant with God, the promise was made to him. You will remember, also, that this friend of God never himself held a single inch of ground in this country. You will remember that Israel and his family sojourned for years in heathen Egypt, and that their possessions in this land were limited to the small sod of earth in which their corpses were laid. May you not, then, be setting a superstitious value upon ground of which your illustrious progenitors, the admitted favourites of Heaven, had certainly no actual tenure?"

III. DIDACTIC. "And one other point in this early history of your race deserves your most careful attention. It is the fortunes of that younger son of Jacob, who, though his father's favourite, was despised and set at nought

by his brethren. They handed him over to Gentiles, and they thought, in the wickedness of their heart, that he was effectually made away with. But God set His heart upon this rejected one, to raise him to a throne. His brethren were to see him again, though in an altered condition, and they were to bow themselves before him to the ground. And ultimately they were to recognise in the lord of all Egypt their rejected, sold, and lost brother. Men of Israel, let me ask whether there has not been One among you of late, a Prophet of your brethren, bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, Whom ye have despised and rejected, and delivered Him up into the hand of the Gentiles, as the patriarchs dealt with Joseph? And let me ask whether it may not have pleased God to exalt this despised Brother of yours to Resurrection Glory and to the Throne of the Universe; and whether He is not even now waiting for you to confess in penitence and faith the grievous wrongs you have done Him, and to give Him the kiss of homage as the Lord's Anointed?"

If Stephen meant to insinuate all this, we may perhaps ask why he was not more explicit. The reason is obvious. The Jews were in an infuriated state, their minds chafed by his controversial successes in the synagogue. And to have been explicit at the outset of his defence would have been, as he saw from their temper, to cut off the only opportunity he had of declaring the truth of Christ to the authorities of his country. It is probable that, had he not been interrupted by the violence of his enemies, the applications of the Jewish history (which in our paraphrase we draw out into detail, *as we go on*) would have come out in one grand burst of indignation *at the end*, wherein every note sounded in the apology—stern reproof, pathetic appeal, indignant repudiation of unfounded charges—would have been heard in full diapason. But by the time that he would have wound up his argument, had he been suffered to proceed, he was in Paradise with his Master; and the gnashing teeth and menacing gestures of Pharisees were exchanged for the gratulations of Angels and the song of welcome and triumph which flowed from their harps. We cannot but admire the profound wisdom which, under such circumstances, secured for him a hearing of any length at all. Our Lord had bidden His disciples be wise as serpents, no less than harmless as doves. And the serpentine wisdom is exemplified in Stephen's defence, no less than the dove-like innocuousness in his prayer for his murderers. It was profoundly wise to suspend their animosity, and bring them into a mood to listen, by recounting the leading events of their national history. Of that national history every Jew felt proud; for although indeed it recorded their constant sinning against privileges, yet it emphasised the privileges against which they sinned. They were never weary of hearing it said or implied—"The Lord hath chosen you to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." And then again, national history was a part of the living oracles with which they, as the Church of the day, were entrusted; and no man who admitted these living oracles, and founded his argument upon them, could well in their esteem be a heretic. So that if to bring a hostile audience into a mood to listen be an attribute of the gift of oratory, it must be admitted that this simple servant of the Lord managed his case with the utmost dexterity, and that in no other way probably could the Sanhedrin have been induced to listen to so much of truth as he contrived to tell them.

But who is that young man in a corner of the council-room, small and undignified in person, and disfigured by a slight twist of the body, but with keen grey eyes glancing restlessly to and fro under somewhat contracted and overhanging eyebrows? His complexion is transparent; and the colour comes

into his cheek, and his brow becomes stern and rigid, as Stephen proceeds with his argument, and makes insinuations unfavourable to the Jews. He is one of the brethren, not one of the fathers whom Stephen addressed ; that is, though a member of the Cilician synagogue, he is no member of the Sanhedrin, or high court of justice ; for he is a young man, and in all likelihood unmarried, whereas it was one of the qualifications for a seat in the High Court that a man should be a father of children, in order that he might be the more disposed to show mercy in judgment. His name is Saul of Tarsus. He is the chosen instrument by whose preaching by and by God is to make the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world. See how eagerly he drinks in every word that is said ! how the Christian orator's arguments sink deep into his soul !

By and by he will reproduce those very arguments. First, he will reproduce them as a reporter. St. Luke the Evangelist, the writer of the Acts, was an intimate friend and companion of St. Paul. And it is in the highest degree probable that, just as the Magnificat, and the incidents of the Divine Infancy and Childhood, were derived by St. Luke from the Blessed Virgin herself, so the account of Stephen's Apology was in the main given him by Saul of Tarsus. No pen and ink, nor art of stenography, would be needed for that report : the intentness of Paul's mind, and his dreadful complicity in what followed, would write it on his memory as with an iron pen ; that single sheep of Christ pleading for his Master against the bloodthirsty wolves who were ready to devour him—could the scene ever be forgotten while memory held her seat ?

But, secondly, Saul will reproduce these arguments as a Christian preacher and writer. The former part of his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia is formed on the plan of Stephen's defence, being a rapid summary of the national history ; and we may gather from that sermon how Stephen would have concluded his address, had time been allowed him. But, indeed, the whole of the Pauline theology finds its germs in this Apology of Stephen's. Paul's assertion that faith was reckoned to Abraham when he was in uncircumcision is merely the unfolding of Stephen's historical statement that God, subsequently to the call and promise, gave Abraham the covenant of Circumcision. Paul was emphatically the Apostle of the Gentiles, maintaining their claim to God's favour and a place in His Kingdom quite independently of the Law or the Temple. And what Stephen's speech really goes to is the very same point—the gist of his argument being this, that there was a promise and a covenant before there was a Temple, before there was a Law, before there was even the rite of Circumcision. Ergo, the Divine promise and covenant made with mankind in Christ must stand clear of the Law, the Temple, and the legal Sacrament. It is the argument of the Epistle to the Galatians.

Let us conclude by the reflection that, as St. Stephen was reproduced in St. Paul, when the latter became a Christian, so there is in the Church of Christ, even as we see it everywhere in the realm of Nature, a law of reproduction, in virtue of which faith, and zeal, and holy enterprise, are propagated to a remote posterity. Every earnest Christian kindled his taper of sacred enthusiasm from the light of some other Christian, just as in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Easter the light which is kindled on the Sepulchre is caught from one another by the tapers of the pilgrims. A good Christian's sermons, a good Christian's writings, above all a good Christian's life, are contagious for good. Persons listening to them, studying them, looking upon them, catch the sacred flame.

St. Stephen's Apology—II.

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"But when the time of the promise drew nigh," &c.—Acts vi. 17-37.

It was remarked in our last Lecture that St. Stephen, in his apology, appears in three characters, as a defendant, pleading his own cause, as a controversialist refuting and inveighing against his theological opponents, and as a preacher setting forth Divine Truth. In our paraphrase of this section of his speech we shall still bring out these three elements of the argument, expanding as before those insinuations of Christian doctrine, which the orator could not convey more explicitly, lest he should be prematurely stopped.

I. APOLOGETIC. "And now I descend to a later period of our national history, in which another character, equally with Joseph rejected of men, and equally with Joseph exalted by God, comes before us. It has been industriously set about among the people that I have at various times uttered blasphemies against Moses. The accusation is a simple slander. I maintain, and have always maintained, that Moses was God's great instrument in fulfilling the promise made to Abraham respecting the deliverance of his seed from foreign bondage. He was born in one of those extremities, which are God's opportunities, when the family of Abraham, having now grown into a nation, were ground down under a different dynasty from that which had shown such favour to Joseph. The surpassing and almost divine beauty of the infant was an omen of his future greatness. This omen indeed was well nigh frustrated, for in infancy he was within a hair's breadth of destruction; but from a poor foundling, wailing feebly in an ark of bulrushes, he became the adopted son of a great princess, and was educated amidst the splendours and luxuries of a court. Not to speak of his possession of all the secular knowledge of the day, he was divinely endowed with gifts in which he was naturally deficient, moral suasion and the power of influence and control over other minds. It might have been supposed that under the circumstances of his education, which had estranged him from his family, the remembrance of his kindred and his race would have been obliterated from his mind. Bred at court from his very babyhood, one might have thought that he would disown and ignore his connexion with a nation of serfs. But not so. His sympathies were Israelite, while his training was Egyptian; and when he had reached a mature age, he sought out the dwellings of his degraded brethren, and casually seeing a wrong done to one of them by an Egyptian, he struck down the oppressor and avenged the oppressed. When the rumour got wind of this blow struck in their defence, the people did not kindle as he had expected; the patriot spirit had been trodden out of their hearts by long years of oppression. The next step was to reconcile their intestine discords; for unless they were united, they would never be strong. Bravery he had shown on their behalf at a great personal risk; and he now wished to animate them with a spirit of brotherly sympathy, so necessary to an effective combination in their defence. But as they had not responded warmly to his assumed championship, so they would have none of his peace-making. The quarrelling Israelites resented his arbitration as unauthorised, and even taunted him with his interference in favour of their countrymen on the previous day. Disgusted by the rejection of his sympathy, and fearing that the offer of it might offend the Egyptian king, he fled into an adjacent country, still a heathen one, where after the lapse of many years he received the Divine Revela-

tion, from which dates the commencement of your Law. That which he had attempted formerly from the promptings of his own sanctified heart he is now called to do by a direct commission from God. With you I entirely believe in that commission. From the burning yet unconsumed bush (type of his nation providentially supported in the furnace of affliction) the Angel of the Covenant Who represented God, and indeed Who was God, spoke audibly to him; announced the interest which He, in common with Moses, felt for the oppressed bond slaves, and proposed to him to become their champion and deliverer. And champion and deliverer he proved, tearing them out of Pharaoh's clutch by exploits of a most marvellous character, and sustaining them during their pilgrimage in the wilderness by manifestations of Divine power equally marvellous."

II. CONTROVERSIAL. "So far you and I are entirely of accord, neither of us calling in question for an instant the surpassing dignity or the Divine legislation of Moses. That so great a prophet sprang from among us is of itself a distinction, which may well make us proud. But this feeling of pride is greatly qualified when we consider the reception Moses met with. If a divinely commissioned champion sprung from the forefathers of our race, it is painfully evident that our forefathers did not appreciate him. They showed the rudest ingratitude for his sympathy; and they positively rejected his arbitration. And there is another incident in this part of the story which bears upon questions on which I am at issue with you. The history of Moses leads us to believe that other spots, ay, and spots in other lands, may be truly consecrated by the Divine Presence, no less than the Temple. You boast of your Shechinah, of the visible glory, which in these later days indeed has been removed, but which in the first Temple dwelt between the Cherubim. But did it never occur to you that there was a Shechinah in the land of Madian; that God manifested Himself as visibly and as resplendently in the glowing thorn of the wilderness as He did over the mercy seat? Can our Temple, then, or our land have that exclusive and inalienable prerogative of sanctity which, in the narrowness of your minds, you claim for them? Is it really in conformity with your own Scriptures to call Gentile countries profane, or Gentiles common or unclean? I know that you decline all association with Gentiles as fraught with impurity and contaminating. But how does this sentiment derive support from the history of your great champion? Was not Moses by God's Providence associated with Gentiles, from his youth upwards; born and bred among Gentiles? Did he take any taint from the learning of the Egyptians with which he was imbued in his earliest years? Was his grand career fulfilled, and his splendid miracles wrought, in Palestine? Or did he never set foot in Palestine at all? You know that, though he was separate from the Egyptians in spirit and principles, he had none of that ceremonial shrinking from them which you manifest toward men of another nation, that he was familiar with their language and manners, and during one third part of his life was in daily intercourse with them."

III. DIDACTIC. "But I have another and more important application to make of the history of Moses. Events in human history often repeat themselves, and the shadows of the future are thrown upon the canvas of the past. I seem to see that this generation has witnessed a career, to which that of Moses bears a striking, and not fortuitous, resemblance. Three-and-thirty years ago an extraordinary Infant was born at Bethlehem. He narrowly escaped in infancy the wrath of a king. Before His birth He had existed previously amid the glories of the Heavenly Court and the anthems of the Angels, far removed from the sins and sufferings of a fallen world. But as it came into Moses' heart at the Egyptian court to visit his brethren, the children of Israel, so His tender

sympathy with the fallen drew the Lord of Glory down to the earth. Like Moses, He was sheltered in Egypt. Like Moses, He grew in wisdom with a preternatural growth—a growth which surprised some of your sages, when they heard Him at twelve years old questioning with the Doctors in the Temple. Like Moses, He came to avenge and deliver the oppressed; and He showed that He did so by striking a blow everywhere at the Devil's power, and delivering men from the thralldom of demoniacal possession, and from the still more galling thralldom of sin. Like Moses, too, He came to reconcile those who were at variance. The Angels chanted at His birth, 'Peace on Earth,' and His Gospel is the Gospel of peace and love. But, again, like Moses, when He came unto His own, His own received Him not. Though you had seen over and over again the credentials of His mission, ye dared to ask Him by what authority He did these things. Ye formally disowned Him before Pilate, and said that Cæsar was your king. And, formal disavowals apart, your whole demeanour towards Him since the beginning of His ministry has been a refusal of His Mediation and a contemptuous saying to Him in the ears of God, and Angels, and men 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' "

We have not yet finished that section of the Apology which deals with the history of Moses. The portions of the speech devoted to the different periods of Jewish history are as follows:—Eighteen verses for the period between Abraham and Moses (about 216 years); twenty-five verses for the period of Moses' life (120 years); three verses for the period from Moses to Solomon (about 701 years). It is clear from hence that the Mosaic period is that which Stephen laboured to bring out in the highest relief. And the reason is obvious. It suited the purpose of his argument to give a special prominence to this period. David is at least as interesting a character (perhaps more interesting, as being more intensely human) as Moses; but David is passed over with the barest mention; his distresses, his triumphs, his sins, are all ignored; and he is introduced only as "desiring to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob." All which shows that it is not the orator's design to give a regular summary of the Jewish history, but to select and emphasize those parts which make most for his own purpose. Bear in mind the charge he had to meet. It was a charge which represented him as derogating from the dignity of Moses, the value of the Law, and the sanctity of the Temple. Hence he is very full upon the history of Moses, and full also upon the history of those transactions of Grace which preceded Moses, and so stood clear of the Law; hence he abounds in allusions to places outside the Holy Land, where God manifested Himself; and hence he kindles into enthusiasm on the spirituality of worship, when he has reached the subject of the Temple. The accusation turned upon Moses, the Law, and the Temple: the defence turns upon Moses, the Law, and the Temple. Thus every word which falls from Stephen's mouth is strictly *ad rem*, and meets the point at issue.

The Training of Moses

BY REV. JAMES BROWN, D.D.

"*Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,*" &c.—Acts vii. 22.

In the history of the leader of the Exodus, the first noteworthy qualification for the work of his life is that he was representative of both of the two classes between whom he was to mediate. He was by birth of the kindred of the oppressed, while by upbringing and education he was connected with their oppressors.

This gave him a breadth of view and of sympathy which he could not otherwise have had. His connection with Israel, the law of whose natural life was the law of sacrifice, gave him depth of character and a native sympathy with things unseen ; while his position in the palace of the Pharaohs gave him all that the highest civilization of the time could bestow. In him already the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians. The learning and wisdom, the might in words and deeds, which Moses acquired in the royal household were infinitely more valuable for the enrichment of the emancipated nation than all the jewels of silver and jewels of gold which they carried with them in their exodus.

But in the training of Moses He Who shapes our ends was careful that the first place should be given to that which lays the deep and enduring foundations of character. Depth must be secured before breadth or height. Unless the roots are struck far into the soil the tree cannot afford to shoot up high or spread its branches wide to catch the influences of the sunlight and the rain. It was by arrangement of infinite wisdom that he who was to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and to be learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians should be first nursed by his own Hebrew mother. No one can calculate the value and enduring influence of the training which begins even before children have attained to the years of consciousness. We do not use a mere figure when we speak, as we so often do, of men having drunk in certain principles with their mother's milk. The mind receives impressions which often prove permanent long before it is conscious that they are being made. It could not but powerfully influence his future that in his infancy Moses looked habitually into a face in which sorrow and hope were blended. For in his mother's face there must have been that depth of sorrow which is only seen in those who have come to a heritage of wrong endured from generation to generation ; and there was the hope which, rooted in ancient promise that God would surely visit His people, had, at the birth of this goodly child, been quickened into the expectation that the hour of deliverance was at hand. When in his later life Moses saw the bush that burned and was not consumed, he but saw in symbol what he had seen in reality in his mother's face, in which hope had lived on and refused to be consumed by the sorrow of the long captivity. From the reflection of that face in which the glory of the Divine Inspirer of hope was seen, Moses' face would shine while yet he wist not of it. Let us give God thanks for our godly mothers ; let us cherish them if they are with us ; let us reverence their memory if they are gone ; and let us recognise the unspeakable power of family life to mould the future of a nation.

Depth of character having been thus secured for the future law-giver, breadth of culture and wider views of men and things than would have been attainable to one of the children of the enslaved Hebrews, were added. The Jewish tradition tells that he was at once instructed in all the knowledge of the time, and trained to a practical acquaintance with affairs of state—learned in wisdom and mighty in words and deeds. According to that tradition, he was admitted to the priestly caste, served in the temple at Heliopolis, and there became versed in the mysteries of the Egyptian religion. Such a training was unspeakably important for one who was to be called to formulate the doctrine and prescribe the ritual of a purer religion. In times of reformation those whom God raises up to lead men to juster conception of His character and purpose, and to simpler and more spiritual worship, have always been trained, and have often been peculiarly zealous in, the faith against which their later teaching was a protest. You hardly need to be reminded that the greatest of Christian Apostles, who did more than all the rest to emancipate the Church from the bondage of the

letter of Judaism, had been an Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as touching the law a Pharisee ; and that Martin Luther, by agonizings in his cell, by pilgrimages to Rome, and by climbings of holy stairways, had sought to attain the best that the old religion could do for him, before he led a liberated Church into the simpler truth, that "The just shall live by faith."

It is only through recent investigation of Egyptian antiquities that we have learned in how much the Mosaic religion is a protest against the errors and superstitions of Egyptian worship. It is deeply interesting to recognise in this first of protestants the tendency with which we are so familiar in later reformers, to go to an extreme in their protest against the errors they condemn. You have often had your attention called to the fact that in the writings of Moses there is no direct teaching of the doctrine of Immortality ; nay, that the whole economy ignores that doctrine as a motive influential on human life. This is inexplicable till we discover how the doctrine is interwoven with the whole Egyptian mythology. Its degrading animal worship had this doctrine, in the form of Transmigration, lying at its foundation. It was not therefore wonderful that he who would emancipate his nation from the superstitions by which they had been surrounded, should in his teaching leave out of view the doctrine which, in the Egyptian mythology, had developments so strange. Our judgment of such men as John Knox, who are so often condemned for the extremes to which they carried their protest against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church cannot but be moderated when we recognise the same tendency in the inspired law-giver of Israel.

But the training of Moses for the great work of his life could not be complete as long as he remained in the high places of Pharaoh's court. As it became Him for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings, so it was necessary that the captain who was to lead the children of Israel to glory of freedom and of a purer faith, should attain his qualification for the work through the discipline of sacrifice. The exodus he was to lead was a part of that long procession down the ages, which, beginning when Abraham left his country and his kindred and his father's house and went out not knowing whither he went, reached its goal at last when He, Who alone rendered the perfect Sacrifice, went forth without the gate bearing the Cross to Calvary. It was necessary that the leader of that exodus should have as his crowning qualification the spirit of the Cross ; that he should be trained and called to deny himself and should make sacrifice to follow the path of duty.

It was when Moses was grown that the great trial came which determined what was to be the spirit of his life, and what manner of man he was to be. His education had been completed. A wealth of experience and a wealth of culture had been gathered. Enriched by the influences which had surrounded his unconscious childhood, and by the learning and wisdom of Egypt, which had laid their treasures at his feet, it had still to be determined whether all this rich capability was to be kindled by the Holy Spirit into a sacrifice and a service to the glory of God and for the good of his brethren ; or whether it was to deaden and harden into a mere selfish possession. In the crisis which came to him, he had to decide whether he would identify himself with the suffering race who were his kindred, and whose cause was the cause of righteousness and mercy ; or whether he would choose to rank on the side of their oppressors, with whom, in upbringing and position, he was already associated. On the one side there was culture, the amenities of life, and brilliant prospects of wealth and power ; on the other side there were the narrowing conditions of a race enslaved and

driven by the lash to cruel tasks, who had become brutalised in feeling through generations of bondage. To choose the one side in the conflict of the time involved no change for Moses; he had but to stay where he was, enjoy the good things by which he was surrounded, do his best to forget the dim memories of his childhood, shut his ears to the cry of the oppressed, and be at ease among his great possessions. To choose the other side involved the sacrifice of royal favour, the giving up of the future which he had been trained to expect, the descent from the very steps of a throne to the hovels of slaves, nay, the incurring of the reproach of ingratitude and the wrath of an offended benefactor.

Pondering the great question of his life which was pressing for decision, he went out to see how it fared with his kindred. He soon became witness of an act of oppression and cruelty. "He saw an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren." He had the fiery vindictive blood of Levi in his veins, and he smote the oppressor. Having satisfied his conscience by this act of vengeance on the wrong-doer, he returned to his place in the court, fondly believing that the deed he had done was hid, and that it was still open to him to decide whether he would finally espouse the Hebrew cause. There was much to be said against his doing so, from the apparent hopelessness of making anything of so depraved a race. His next experience among them seemed to illustrate that hopelessness. He found an Hebrew doing as foul a wrong to one of his own people as he had seen done by the Egyptian. When he interfered in behalf of the wronged he was assailed with scornful words. The deed, in doing which he had risked so much, was cast in his teeth, and he had the sickening experience which is almost sure to come to everyone who seeks to elevate the degraded—of the hopelessness of the task to which he had set himself, and of the ingratitude with which it is likely to be repaid. He might possibly have turned aside from that to which the better instincts of his heart inclined him, and sunk back into a contented worldling; but God had shut him in. The intimation, which the sneer of the Israelite conveyed, that the slaying of the Egyptian was known, was immediately followed by signs of Pharaoh's wrath; and so now the die was cast, and "by faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

To all young men there comes in one form or another a like crisis to that through which Moses passed. When they have through training and education reached equipment for the work of life, the decision has to be made as to whom they shall serve. Shall they live for self, walking in the sight of their eyes and in the desire of their hearts, following the world's maxims and seeking the world's rewards, or shall they consecrate themselves to the service of God and men, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. The question does not generally present itself in an abstract form, so that it can be deliberated on and debated, and then decided calmly in view of all the consequences on either side. It presents itself for the most part in the concrete, when, a crisis coming ere we are aware of it, we are called to act in some particular case, our action in which practically determines all our future conduct. Choices of Hercules, temptations in the wilderness, come to all at the gateway of life, and the manner in which we demean ourselves in the early conflicts in which duty comes into antagonism with inclination, and brotherliness into collision with self-interest is practically decisive as to whether we shall be of those who, saving their lives do lose them, or of those who losing their lives do find them unto life eternal. Let there be but one firm and unfaltering "Get thee behind me, Satan," to him who seeks to allure us from duty by the glittering promise of the world,

and the battle is as good as won. For then, as of old, shall the devil leave us and Angels shall come and minister to us.

But how are we to have strength to act as Moses acted in the crisis of his life ? There are two statements concerning him which are deeply instructive to us. The one is, " He endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." It is only by faith in the unseen that men are enabled to acquit themselves nobly in the great crisis of life. To those who regard only the visible and the material, it would seem the height of folly to act as Moses did, to sacrifice a high position, and to cast away brilliant prospects, in an apparently hopeless effort to right a wrong for the existence of which he had no responsibility. But when we look beneath the surface of things, into the unseen relations which underlie our lives, then the folly of the world becomes the wisdom of God, and the worldling's choice is seen to be like that of Esau when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. When seen in the light of the long results of time then invisible, the choice of Moses was a casting away of the shadowy that he might grasp the real, a removing of the temporary that he might attain the enduring. If he had chosen the treasures of Egypt, the recompense of his reward might have been a few years of uncertain power, followed by embalment and a resting-place in some Egyptian tomb. By choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God he attained a power to mould the thought and life of a millennium, and a place among the sceptred souls, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and whose dominion endureth throughout all generations.

There is yet another statement to which we do well to give heed. He esteemed, we are told, the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The name of Christ he knew not, but it was the Spirit of Christ Which was in him that moved him to make the sacrifice. The inspiration of Moses' nobleness is thus within the reach of all of us. If the mind which is in Christ Jesus be found in us : if through faith in Him, and fellowship of heart with Him, we drink in His Spirit : that Spirit will guide us aright in every crisis of our life, will give us strength to refuse the glittering evil and choose the more sombre and apparently unattractive good.

Moses, having thus through the manifold culture of his time attained the intellectual training needed for the work of his life, and having, through the great trial in which the invisible conquered, been morally trained, had yet need of a further training which we may call the spiritual. He was led into the wilderness, where, amid the unspeakably impressive surroundings of the most desolate and yet glorious scenery on earth, and through years of solitude and silence, all that he had attained through the past education and experience of life was matured and bathed in the light of the divine. Humanly speaking Moses could not have been made the man he was, capable of going up into the thick darkness where God is, and yet of legislating on minutest points of ceremonial and life, if he had remained till the eve of the exodus on the monotonous flats of Egypt, where there is nothing but a narrow strip of corn-land, and gardens of herbs lying on either side of the river and girdled by the sandy waste—where there is no height more considerable than chalky cliffs, and where there is the continual babblement of a swarming population. But when he fled into the land of Midian he found himself under the shadow of majestic mountains whose very nakedness is beautiful with alternations of richest colours, and whose silence is so deep that the grains of sand falling down the mountain sides make music as of tinkling bells. Amid these glorious mountains there are sometimes at sunrise or at sunset glimpses as into the very Heaven of Heavens ; and when a thunderstorm comes on, there are sounds that seem not of the earth, which go rolling about from

peak to peak, while as from hidden depths streams seem to gush out of flinty rocks. That land of Midian must have been to the Egypt-born and Egypt-bred Moses as a land of marvel and of mystery. His experience there crowned his training. It was essential that the leader of the exodus and the law-giver of Israel should not only be intellectually able, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds; not only morally noble, one who could choose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. It was essential that he should have the deep spiritual experience, the solitary fellowship of soul with the Highest, which constitute those who have them, in some sense poets. The promulgator of the new religion, which in the end was to develop into a universal faith, must learn to see every bush in the wilderness ablaze with the divine glory, burning but not consumed; and to hear God's eternal law proclaimed as with the sound of a trumpet by every thunderstorm which rolls its echoes among the mountains.

And in the training of every man who would attain to the highest type of human life, and to the greatest possible power to influence other lives for good, there is something more needed than the culture of the intellectual, something more even than the development of the moral nature, before it reaches the power to render any sacrifice required by God and duty. If we would attain the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ all this must be crowned by the spiritual. We must learn to see the vision and to dream the dream. We must rise into fellowship with the unseen, and behold the world transfigured in the light that never was on sea or land. Our eyes must be open to the glory of the Lord which shines refulgent on every bush, and our ears must be quick to hear His voice, which whispers in every passing breeze and waxes louder and louder in every storm. We must attain that reverence without which the highest gifts are vain, and be willing to bow as children before the unfathomable mystery of God, taking our shoes from off our feet because we stand on holy ground. All this can only be reached through habitual retirement from the babble of the world, through patient waiting for God's promised revelation to faithful hearts and God's appointed time for opening to us the path of duty.

St. Stephen's Apology—III.

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"This is that Moses," &c.—Acts vii. 37-53.

Let us continue our paraphrase of the speech, upon the framework already traced out, separating its apologetic, didactic, and controversial elements.

I. APOLOGETIC. "I admit, as I have already said, the surpassing dignity of Moses. He it was who mediated between the Jehovah Angel and our fathers in the wilderness—the chosen one, who stood before Him oftentimes in the gap, to turn away His wrathful indignation, lest He should destroy them. He it was who received and transmitted to you the Oracles of God; living Oracles, I grant, whose natural force, like that of the lawgiver, is nothing abated by their extreme antiquity. You see that I by no means undervalue your Law. To add to its dignity and solemnity, the Angels assisted at the giving of it, and communicated its arrangements to Moses, as he in his turn communicated them to the people. That it proceeded ultimately from God; that Angels were the supernatural, Moses the human agent who negotiated it with you; that he

and all the prophets whom God has since raised up to you, spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost—all this I steadfastly believe; and believing thus much, can I be the heretic which this charge represents me to be? Moses it was who saw in the mount, while holding high converse with God, an exact pattern of your Sanctuary—a pattern expressed upon earth, as far as materials of wood, and metal, and linen could express it, first by the Tabernacle, and subsequently by the Temple.”

II. DIDACTIC. “But you should remember that Moses suffered not his people to rest in himself. He distinctly intimated that his ministry was not final, in fact was to be superseded by another and a greater. He spoke of a future Prophet, like himself, to Whom he referred the people with a ‘Him shall ye hear’—a significant intimation that his own instructions should cease, when this Prophet had been found; that this Prophet was the end of the Law for righteousness. And all the Prophets in grand chorus have chimed in with this testimony of Moses. They have all foreshown, without a single exception, a just One; have pointed on into the far distance to One Who should satisfy every claim of God and man, and fulfil all righteousness.”

III. CONTROVERSIAL. “But this testimony you reject, as in their days your fathers rejected the bearers of it. Indeed, your national history is only one long record of the sins of your ancestors against Light and Grace. When Moses was in the mount, transacting with God on their behalf, Israel apostatized from Him even as now, when our Lord is in Heaven, interceding for you, you are sending messages of defiance after Him, and declining His rule. Jealous for the honour of your Temple indeed! Very little jealousy did your fathers show for God’s house of prayer in the days of old, or for His ordinance of worship. In the very lifetime of their Lawgiver they led up a sacrifice in solemn procession to the golden calf which Aaron had made. As if in mimicry of the sacred tabernacle, which journeyed in the midst of them, they raised aloft and carried in state the shrine of Moloch, and the star of Remphan, emblematising the heavenly host, to which in lieu of God they paid their homage. Amos, no member of the prophetic schools, but a herdman and gatherer of sycamore-fruit, whom the Lord raised up to speak His word, reproved them for this with a trenchant irony. And the prophet Isaiah reproved them not only for the gross corruptions, but also for the unspirituality of their worship. You should lay his words to heart. When speaking in the Name of the Lord, he says, ‘Heaven is My Throne, and earth is My footstool; what house will ye build Me, saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?’ does he not condemn that narrow and superstitious estimate of the building, which confines all acceptable worship to that sacred precinct? You will not refuse to acknowledge Isaiah as a prophet. Is he on your side or on mine in this controversy respecting the Temple? Why, Isaiah echoes with peculiar emphasis the very question which Solomon himself asked in the dedication of the Temple—‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the Heaven and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?’”

But at this period of the address something made the mind of the orator move with greater impetus, and struck off from his tongue those shackles of caution which had hitherto restrained it. It is not hard to see what that something was. First, there was the natural friction which his own argument produced in his mind. As he traced the history of his nation, view after view opened upon him of the perversity, the narrow bigotry, the wilful opposition to truth, which had characterised them at every period. They had been only too consistent all along in their miserable course of rejecting Divine messages; and

now by their rejection of the Son of God, and of the Spirit of God, Who had spoken to them in the Apostles, they had put the finishing stroke upon their sin, and had filled up the measure of their iniquity. This repeated defiance of God on their part stirs him, galls him, chafes him, and kindles in him a holy indignation against the stiff-necked, ceremonious hypocrites in the midst of whom he was standing. And in all probability his quotation from Isaiah, so palpably adverse to their view of the Temple, and at the same time so impossible to be answered as drawn from an acknowledged prophet, stung them to the quick. This is indicated in the account of their demeanour which St. Luke subjoins: "When they heard these things" (it should rather be, "They, while hearing these things"—while in the act of listening to him) "were cut to the heart, and they gnashed" (were constantly gnashing, or, as we should say, "kept gnashing") "upon him with their teeth." It is not difficult to picture the scene. Audible murmurs of dissatisfaction are heard as Stephen says out boldly that "God, being a Spirit, dwelleth not in temples made with hands," and clenches his argument with a quotation from Isaiah. They make menacing gestures, and glance at him fiercely, as wild beasts who would spring upon their prey. Those two scribes, reaching across to one another, have got a scroll between them, in which they are pointing to passages which they think confute him. One finger is on the words—"I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put My Name there for ever; and Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually": the fist of the other hand contracts, and is raised towards the prisoner. The young man from the Cilician synagogue glances to and fro from the accused to Gamaliel, and from Gamaliel to the accused. That great doctor of the law had in a previous council made a diversion in favour of the Apostles. But on that occasion it appears that the high priest had been under the influence of the sect of the Sadducees; and that Gamaliel, a strict Pharisee, should moderate the indignation of the council, when the point maintained by the Apostles was our Lord's Resurrection from the dead, was to be expected, however little sympathy he might have with Christianity in other aspects of it. Stephen's speech brought out into full prominence not the anti-Sadducaic element (be it remembered he was not an Apostle, whose office was to be a witness of the Resurrection), but the anti-Pharisaic element of the Gospel. And as he did so the eyes of Saul are turned wistfully towards his great authority, Gamaliel. Those eyes ask—"Do you hear his audacious words against the Temple and the holy seed of Abraham? What have you to say for him now? Will you plead for these Nazarenes once again as you did at the last council?" And Gamaliel's contracted brow, and the shadow which has fallen on his face, answer that he has given up the patronage of Nazarenes, and will not be any longer their apologist.

There is evidently a storm of animosity brewing against Stephen in the hearts of his hearers. He catches the symptoms of it with that quick apprehension of the feelings of an audience which always characterises an earnest speaker. And seeing in them for a moment the wicked husbandmen who had stoned one of God's messengers, and had slain another, and beaten another, and at length had risen up against and slaughtered His Son, he bursts forth upon them after the following manner:—

"These murmurs, these menaces, this impatience of truth which you are now manifesting, show that you are cast in the same type of character as your fathers. Your national history is consistent throughout; it has been, it is now, one of resistance to Grace. Those who by God's commission showed Christ's coming beforehand your fathers slew one after another. It has been reserved for you to put the crown upon their guilt, and to prove yourselves their true descendants,

and the inheritors of their principles, by slaying the Son of God Himself. O highly favoured but unfaithful race; Israelites by blood, but not Israelites indeed; Jews outwardly in the flesh, but not inwardly in the spirit, how vain your boast of having received the law through the ministry of Angels, seeing ye violate every principle of its holy requirements!"

Thus the words of the Psalmist seem to represent the process of St. Stephen's mind in his apology. In the early part of his speech he is cautious, and avoids giving offence; "he keeps his mouth, as it were, with a bridle, while the ungodly is in his sight." But at last his heart grows hot within him, and while he is musing upon the circumstances he has recited, the fire kindles; and at the last he throws away his caution, and speaks in accents of burning indignation.

The public Ministry of our Blessed Lord ended with a burst of indignation against the scribes and Pharisees, in which are found all the topics which appear in the close of St. Stephen's address, only expressed with an even greater vehemence. The disciple's protest is strong: but when we compare it with the Master's it is as the light of the moon compared with that of the sun—a weaker reproduction of the same sentiment. The last public words which our Lord spake at His solemn final exit from the Temple (for the great Prophecy on the Mount which follows was delivered privately to the circle of His disciples) were these, and be it remembered that just as Stephen's final invective determined his fate, so immediately after these words of our Lord was held the council which came to the resolution of destroying Him: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" &c. Now this resemblance of our Lord's language to St. Stephen's at once throws light upon St. Stephen's language, and enables us to draw the right lesson from it. Is it possible to denounce men as serpents and a generation of vipers, and yet to have a heart of love towards them? It is quite possible; else we should not find such words in our Lord's mouth, Who is the Incarnate Love. Nay, it is possible for these two things, love and vehement righteous indignation, to co-exist even in our sinful and corrupt nature. That they did co-exist in St. Stephen, who was a man of like passions with ourselves, is clear from the sequel, in which he prays for his murderers. Shall we then say, by way of explaining to ourselves the apparent inconsistency, that the words in such cases are only words; that there is no sentiment corresponding to them in the heart of him who utters them? Surely not. God forbid that we should suppose the words of our Blessed Lord and of His saints to be other than a true reflex of their sentiments! Such an hypothesis is by no means necessary to solve the difficulty which these facts present. Our Blessed Lord's human spirit was stirred within him, St. Stephen's spirit was stirred within him, by the remembrance and by the present evidences of Jewish perversity. They felt and they expressed a righteous indignation against stubborn opposition to God's Truth. Be it remarked that it was a righteous indignation, fastening in both cases upon the moral character of the opponents, not upon personal affronts received from them. And this remark leads us to Bishop Butler's theory of the original constitution of our nature, and to the place which anger held in it; a theory not only true philosophically, but serving to explain much in Holy Scripture, which without the theory would be incapable of explanation. According to this theory, then, none of the great original affections of our nature are in themselves sinful; they become sinful only when indulged in excess; or when, by being harboured and cherished too much, they assume a morbid shape; or when they are allowed to usurp the place of the conscience and to govern the will; or, finally, when they are fastened upon wrong objects. This is the case with anger, one of those sentiments of the heart, whose moral rectitude

might be altogether questioned. In the natural man it fastens upon personal affronts as its most congenial object; it is kept in the chamber of the heart, until it sours and corrupts; and alas! it often hurries away the will into an act of spitefulness and revenge. But supposing that it fastened upon moral wrong that it was never indulged to excess; that it never destroyed the most perfect self-control (and this was the shape in which our Blessed Lord, and He only, of all mankind, consistently exhibited it), there would then be no sin in anger, rather anger, in this form of it, is an element of a perfect character, and indeed the other side of Love. I speak advisedly in calling it the other side of Love. In God there is (to speak with entire accuracy) only one perfection; and that perfection is Love. His Truth is Love: His Holiness is Love: His Justice is Love: and His anger is Love. The narrowness and limitation of our minds makes it necessary for us to think of these attributes separately; but in truth they have a common ground and meeting-point in God's Love, just as heat, and light, and all the colours find their focus in the sun. Love, in its aspect towards misery, is compassion. Towards a moral fall brought about by weakness, by surprise, by strength of temptation, Love maintains still the same aspect—compassion. But towards wrong perversely done, wilful opposition to the Truth, stubborn defiance of Divine warnings, what aspect must Love necessarily assume? It must become anger. God's Love makes Him long to win and save souls. Now if this disposition on the part of God meet (in the mystery of man's free will) with a determination on the part of man to oppose God's way of salvation, and to discourage, as far as possible, those who wish to avail themselves of that way (and nothing less than this was the sin of the scribes and Pharisees), the Love of God, finding this opposition to its counsels of mercy, becomes wrath, as a brimming river, which hastens to the sea, frets and chafes itself against a dyke. Now the mind of God dwells in Christ; and the mind of Christ, by the Holy Ghost, dwells in Christ's disciples.

But to descend to the consideration of our own rule of life as sinful men. It is observable that the New Testament precept on the subject of anger is, in so many words, a restraint, and not a prohibition: "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Anger in itself is no sin; but it has a tendency to become so rapidly, if it be harboured too long. Like the manna, it corrupts and breeds worms, if kept over night in the close chamber of the heart. Then it will appear in the morbid shapes of spite, malice, revenge. The Christian rule is to throw it all away before the fermentation commences.

What has been said may read us a most useful lesson on the subject of spurious charity, a lesson much needed in these times. Charity is not uniform suavity under all circumstances; it has in it a stern element of moral indignation, which indeed is the salt that preserves it from corruption. Charity is the love of souls; and as being the love of souls, it is necessarily at issue with everything which endangers souls, or which is plainly mischievous to them. Charity never flatters or soothes a man in wilful sin, but tells him plainly he shall die, if he holds by it; just as a surgeon, who desires nothing but the health of his patient, does not hesitate to perform a painful operation. And because heresy, no less than sin, is mischievous to souls, charity pays no compliments to heresy, and will have no fellowship with heretics; its voice is, "If there come any unto you, and bring not the doctrine (of Christ), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds"; and its way of action is that of St. John, who fled out of the bath when he heard that Cerinthus was there, "lest," said he, "the roof should fall in upon so great a heretic, and I be involved in the same ruin." I cannot truly

love either God or man, if I can stand by with a creamy smoothness of face, and see souls seduced into sin or entangled in vital error. And if some safeguards be required for the perfect righteousness of indignation under such circumstances, perhaps these may suffice :—

1. Rid the mind as much as possible of all resentment on the ground of personal affront or slight.

2. If it be error which rouses your indignation, make sure that it is *vital* error, and do not confound the truth with your own view of it.

Living Oracles

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"Who received the lively oracles to give unto us."—Acts vii. 38.

There are those who confess themselves unable to discern in St. Stephen's defence before the Jewish Council anything directly bearing upon the accusation which it sought to refute. They only read it as a rehearsal of his creed as a believer in the Jewish Scriptures. They suppose him to have desired to ingratiate himself with his audience, by reciting to them the history of God's dealings with their nation, and showing himself a true-hearted Israelite, incapable of doing despite to the Law or to the Temple. And no doubt it is the speech of a simple and perhaps unlettered man, not the composition of a master of rhetoric or an experienced debater. No doubt also its opening paragraphs are so expressed as to avoid prematurely irritating his judges by an avowal of the personal application which lies beneath all and at length bursts from his lips. We may suppose also, if we will, that the address was rudely interrupted before it had reached that orderly close which might have given clearness and consistency to the whole.

But, with all these abatements, which of us may not admire in this defence a real and true fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist"?

For what, let us remember, was the crime imputed to him? Irreverence towards the Law of Moses and the Temple, shown in predicting that the time was at hand when the Lord and Saviour would bring both to an end, this was the offence of the prisoner as defined by the accusers and substantiated by their witnesses.

How could any line of defence be more suitable than one which, while recognising to the full the divine mission of Moses, the divine origin of the Law, and the divine institution of the Temple, should yet show that these things were all supplementary in their introduction and parenthetical in their design? That the promises of God, as made to the forefathers of Israel, were entirely independent, both in place and time, of those institutions which were now regarded as their sole depository and shrine? That the call of Abraham was made far away from Canaan, and that whole centuries even of the later national history were passed in other lands? That the great Lawgiver himself was not only refused and disobeyed by his people, but himself prophesied of the coming of a greater and mightier than himself? That this Temple on which they prided themselves, on which they threw the whole stress of their faith and dependence, had not only been late in its erection, but was also spoken of by their own prophets as never (in the highest sense of all) the dwelling-place of God? And that,

finally, no amount of confidence on their part in the clearness of their discernment or the justice of their judgment, on a question of religion or of revelation, could be the slightest indication, in reality, of truth or right ; every prophet, in his generation, having been set at nought and persecuted, not excluding even the Messiah Himself, of Whom, while professing daily to look for Him, they had themselves been now the betrayers and murderers ? I know not that any line of argument, any amount of premeditation or any art of eloquence, could have touched more exactly the very point at issue, or entered more thoroughly into the hidden principles which gave interest and importance to the decision.

“ You charge me with disparaging the local character of our religion. You say that I speak of this Temple as destined to an overthrow predicted by the Master. Let me remind you then how far, and how far only, the faith of our fathers is bound up with local conditions. The original home and cradle of our race was not Palestine, but Mesopotamia, in the far East, on the other side of the great river, the river Euphrates. It was there that the voice of God was first heard calling to man fallen. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he even dwelt in Haran ; before even that first migration which landed him not in Canaan, but in a temporary resting-place. Hence in due season He removed him, by the same Divine call into this land in which ye now dwell. But how did he enter it ? As an owner ? as a conqueror ? as a sovereign ? Nay, he possessed not in it land enough to set his foot on. And yet the promises were all his even then ; and the Divine favour and protection ; and the Divine communion and friendship. Judge ye therefore how far God's blessing is local ! Judge ye, even in this first and greatest example, how far God is a respecter either of place or form !

“ And that independence of place which was first exemplified in Abraham, was indicated no less in the prediction of his children's fortunes. In a strange land should they sojourn for centuries, and yet be God's people and God's chosen still. See how that prophecy was fulfilled ; by what sins, through what sufferings, of man ; by what providences and what interpositions on the part of God. Behold the young brother sold as a slave by foes of his own household : see him carried into a remote and unfriendly land ; him, the best and noblest of the sons of Israel : see him cast out of his father's home as one despised and forsaken, and yet, through vicissitudes as strange as they were sudden, raised to the pinnacle of greatness, while his father's sons bowed down to him. Does the thought occur to you, that in the varying fortunes of Joseph may have been prefigured the suffering and glory of a later and a mightier One ? May not your own hands be wet with the blood of a Brother after the flesh, Who is also after the spirit your Lord and your Judge ?

“ Trace then yet onward the course of the national history, and see the whole family of Israel seeking refuge out of Canaan : see generation after generation toiling on in Egyptian bondage ; excluded from the land of promise, yet losing thereby no one mark of their ancestral privilege ; still recognised, in Heaven if not upon earth, as God's people, beloved for the fathers' sake. And yet, all this time, nothing was theirs in Canaan but a burying-place, and century after century was wheeling its slow course over their exile. Mark then how the national fortunes were sunk to their lowest level ; the very permission to live sought in vain for their sons from their oppressors ; when at last he arose, guarded by God's special Providence from a threatened similar fate, who was to be first the deliverer from bondage, and then (under God) the founder of a new Dispensation.

“ And observe, when he came, late in time and mature in age ; came with thoughts and words of kindness, seeking to reconcile or to avenge his brethren ;

how he was received and dealt with. Who made thee (it was said to him) a ruler and a judge over us? If he whom you so much reverence was once thus despised and rejected of his countrymen, may it not perhaps have been so with One Whom God sent to supersede him? Can you urge as an argument against the mission of Jesus that general reproach and rejection, which would have been equally fatal to the authority of Moses? For forty years he was in exile; a double exile; not from Canaan only, but from Egypt also. At last his call came; came, once more, not in the land of promise, but in the wilderness; came, too, on the ground not of a new but of an old relationship; not as to the founder of a new religion, but as to the inheritor of a patriarchal covenant. Forget not Abraham in Moses! Never allow yourselves to date from Sinai a possession which was yours from Mesopotamia and from Haran! In your zeal for a Levitical law, lose not sight of a patriarchal promise! The God Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush of Horeb was already the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob!

"This Moses whom your ancestors refused, the same did God send to be their ruler and their deliverer. He brought them out. And do I disparage his high mission, by declaring that he was neither the first nor yet the last of God's messengers; that his dispensation came in but by the way, between the Patriarchal and the Messianic? Listen to his own words. A Prophet (he said) shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. He himself pointed the eye of faith onward to One Who should come; like himself, as to the human nature; yet greater than himself, in proportion as the forerunner is less than the foreannounced, the servant of one nation than the Lord of all. I then am but echoing the voice of Moses, when I declare that the customs which he delivered were not designed to be indestructible or final.

"This is that Moses: and how did you receive him? He was with the Church in the wilderness: with him was the Angel of the Divine Presence: to him were delivered those living oracles by which God communicated with His people: how did you treat him? Again and again you thrust him from you, and in your hearts turned back again into Egypt: little did you think then of that pleasant land which you would now make the whole of your inheritance and of your hope: yea, in the very wilderness you committed idolatry, and drew down upon you, before you entered Canaan, the threat of a second exile, of a national dispersion.

"You charge me with blasphemy against the Temple. What have I said of it? I have said, it may be, that the Temple was no more God's first or God's last dwelling-place below, than the Dispensation of Moses was either God's earliest or God's latest revelation. I have said that before the Temple was a Tabernacle; a Tabernacle fashioned under Divine direction; and exhibiting in solemn type realities which have their place in Heaven. That was the centre of the Divine Presence with Israel at the time when Joshua conquered, and through all the generations from Joshua to David. Does that consist with the idolatry of this Temple, as though without it God's Presence would be impossible? Nay, have not your own Prophets declared that no temple made with hands can contain or enclose God? that Heaven is His Throne and earth is His footstool, and the very house which you build for Him already His handywork?

"But with what hope can I urge upon you suggestions of reason or arguments of revelation? There is in you a tradition of resistance to the divine and the spiritual. Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. As they did to the servants, so have ye done to the Master: they slew the heralds of the Just One, and ye have been now His betrayers and murderers. O blessed

and privileged—knew ye but your happiness—above all nations ! possessors of a Law, in the promulgation of which on Mount Sinai the very principalities and powers in heavenly places exercised a solemn and terrific office ! and yet not keeping it ; trilling ever with God's day of visitation, until at last your house is left unto you desolate ! ”

Thus far I have sought to trace for you the order of St. Stephen's defence ; supplying here and there a link of thought perhaps intentionally left obscure, and passing lightly over many details, both of history and of argument, which seemed less than essential to its understanding as a whole. I trust there may be those amongst us whose reverence for God's Word may be heightened or quickened by our present study of one of its parts.

And now, before we pass to our conclusion, I will address one earnest word to persons who may have noticed with anxiety in this chapter, or who may have heard it noticed by others in a tone of cavil or disbelief, that in one or two minor points the account here given of the Jewish history seems to vary from that contained in the narrative of the Old Testament. For example, the history in the Book of Genesis tells us that the burying-place bought by Abraham was in Mamre or Hebron, not at Sychem ; and that it was bought by him of Ephron the Hittite, Jacob (not Abraham) being the purchaser of the ground at Shechem of the sons of Hamor Shechem's father. My friends, can you really suppose that a difference of this nature has anything to do, this way or that, with the substantial truth of the Gospel Revelation ? I declare to you that I would not waste the time in endeavouring (if I were able) to reconcile such a variance. It is to be regretted that Christian persons, in their zeal for the literal accuracy of our Holy Book, have spoken and written as if they thought that anything could possibly depend upon such a question. We all know how easy it is to get two witnesses in a court of justice to give their stories of an occurrence in the same words : we all know also how instant is the suspicion of falsehood which that formal coincidence of statement brings upon them. Holy Scripture shows what I may indeed call a noble superiority to all such uniformity. Each book of our Bible is an independent witness ; shown to be so, not least, by verbal or even actual differences on some trifling points of detail. And they who drink most deeply at the fountainhead of Divine Truth, learn to estimate these things in the same manner ; to feel what we might describe as a lordly disdain for all infidel objections drawn from this sort of petty, paltry, cavilling, carping, creeping criticism. Let our faith at last, God helping us, be strong enough and decided enough to override a few, or a multitude, of such objections ! We will hear them unmoved : we will fearlessly examine them : if we cannot resolve them, then, in the power of a more majestic principle, we will calmly turn from them and pass them by. What we know not now, we may know hereafter ; and if we *never* know, we will believe still !

For indeed the “ lively oracles ” of which the text speaks to us were given for other purposes than that of a merely intellectual satisfaction. What St. Stephen says of the Law or of the books of Moses, what St. Paul says of the Old Testament Scriptures in general, we shall all be prepared to claim as the description of our two Testaments, and of that Holy Bible which contains them both. That Book, as a whole, is our oracle : in it are comprised the living oracles, the oracles of God.

An oracle is the answer of a God. In days of old, days of heathen superstition, men went with their difficulties to obtain an answer at some recognised utterance-place of their God. If a man was going to undertake an enterprise of any kind, if a king was about to make war upon another king, if a private person was at

a loss upon any subject of domestic concern, he went, as it was said, to consult an oracle ; to ask for an inspired direction whether he should go or not go, whether he should act or whether he should forbear. These days are past. It was a natural wish—one which we have all felt a thousand times—to have some finger-post erected for us at one of the ambiguous turning-points of life, saying, This is the way, not that : this is the path of safety ; this is the way of duty : take this road, and thou shalt be safe ; take not this, and thou shalt do well. In days of oracular responses, the answer was so framed, by the craft and fraud of priests, that, whichever way the event shaped itself, the answer could scarcely be found wanting : all was ambiguity, all was double-tongued : the credit of the oracle, not the welfare of the consultor, was the thing aimed at and guarded. Now *the oracles are dumb* : men found them out, and *a more excellent way* was opened.

The Bible is God's oracle. It is a *living* oracle, not a dumb or dead one. It has a voice for every man in every circumstance. Men gather round it day by day from East and West, men of diverse race and lineage and speech, of various tastes and habits and circumstances ; and to each one it speaks audibly ; to each one it speaks individually, and it speaks decisively. All our difficulties, all our perplexities, all our intricate and secret distresses, we may bring them to the Bible, and we shall find our way.

But how does it do this ? Are we, like the superstitious of other days, to open our Bible at random, and take the first verse which meets us as our guide ? Or is one who has neglected his Bible through long days of prosperity, to read it for the first time in his trouble, and be sure of a clear and loud response ? God cares more for us than to give us this sort of ready-made, indolent direction. The oracle itself is vocal only to the wise ; only, that is, to those who daily visit it, and seek to frame life and speech, thought and action, habitually by its rule. If a man complains that he gets no good from his Bible, depend upon it that man does not read it ; does not read it regularly, or does not read it upon his knees. It is by visiting our oracle daily, even as we daily need guidance ; it is by coming to it as to God's Presence, not superstitiously indeed, but reverently and devoutly ; it is by living much in that heavenly atmosphere, becoming used to it so that its tone and its air shall be ours, its mode of judging of men and things familiar and at last habitual to us ; it is by so reading God's Word as that what it reveals it reveals to us, and what it enjoins it enjoins upon us, and what it promises it promises to us ; it is in this way that the dead page starts into life, and the black ink into a voice, and the written word into a quickening spirit, so that at last its principles are our principles, and its judgments our judgments, and its ways of thinking (which are God's ways) ours : and then insensibly we begin to view each particular occurrence as God views it, and to hear each call of duty as God utters it : the things that are seen shrink into their due dimensions beside things that are not seen, and time becomes as nothing in the light of eternity, and misfortune which has chastened is honestly felt to have been a blessing, and disappointment which makes earth blank makes Heaven bright to us : and on the other hand, sin which has brought its pleasures is looked upon as a twofold evil, and duty which has had its hardships is welcomed as a double good : and then at length the soul which has learned God's language is fitted to converse with God, and the life which has been transformed is ready to be transplanted, and a well-known voice is heard saying, " Come up hither. and I will show thee things which must be hereafter ! "

Fearless Witness

BY VERY REV. J. W. BURGON, B.D.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," &c.—Acts vii. 51-53.

On a review of the narrative, nothing seems better worthy of our attention than the plainness and the boldness of St. Stephen's entire discourse. It is easy, because it is safe, when Religion is a *fashionable* thing, to deliver one's sentiments on the side of the truth. But let anyone picture to himself the dangers and difficulties under which this man pleaded the cause of a Crucified Saviour before his infuriated countrymen; and it will be felt that his was an heroic part indeed. Twice is it recorded of him that he was "full of faith"; and truly there was need of that great gift in full measure, at such a time to bear such a witness. For here was not one who had "companied" with the Twelve "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out" among them. He seems only newly to have become a disciple; and his belief brought him at once into collision with much of the best learning, as well as of the most violent prejudice, which was already so largely enlisted on the other side. When it is stated that certain "*of them of Cilicia*" disputed with Stephen, *who* sees not that Saul of Tarsus must have been among the most formidable of St. Stephen's opponents? His testimony, however, is express and fearless throughout; and his concluding words gather up all the indignation of a generous spirit in a few withering sentences. "Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of Whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the Law by the disposition of Angels, and have not kept it!"

To attempt to rival so great a Saint were evidently to "stretch ourselves beyond our measure": and indeed, such occasions and opportunities of serving God as we have been considering, may be said not to present themselves now-a-days at all. Let it not be supposed, however, from this that St. Stephen's example is without its use; or that we shall be without opportunities of treading in his footsteps. It is not so. We may tread in his footsteps, if we will, daily. Under certain circumstances it is not too much to assert that opportunities are of even hourly occurrence. They present themselves as often as the claims of the World and of Christ are brought into collision, or even into contrast. On such occasions we may be called upon, nay, we may be compelled, to take our side: we may at least be required to say something which shall sufficiently show which side we should take, were we forced to make our election. And though silence at such times may seem to be our wisest (as it doubtless will be our safest) course—yet is it not impossible to conceive situations in which silence would be not only the veriest cowardice, but the veriest treason likewise.

This is one of those matters which do not admit of precision while discussed generally. The duty of Confessorship is plain: but the occasion on which any individual person is called upon to make a public profession of his Faith cannot be so easily defined. Circumstances of age, and time, and place must be allowed often materially to affect the question. The duty however, as already declared, is plain, after every allowance has been made for occasions when to speak were out of place or unbecoming; and it is at our peril that we overlook it. To suffer a false statement of Divine Truth to pass us by uncontradicted: to admit a

Doctrine which we know to be heretical: to wink at the alienation from God of the honour which we know to be due to His holy Name, to His holy Word, or to His holy Day; what is all this but to forsake our Master? to deny the Lord Who bought us? It may be done in many ways; and this it is which should make us at once so suspicious of ourselves, as well as so watchful. The most ordinary action may be as complete a denial of Christ as the most open act of apostacy. Did not Judas betray his Master *with a kiss*?

Devotion to the Conventional

BY REV. STOFFORD A. BROOKE, LL.D.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," &c.—Acts vii. 51-53.

One of the worst of national sins is the rejection or the neglect by the mass of the people of the great men whom God has sent to save the nation, to teach the nation, or to give ideas to the nation. It is a proof of the perfect culture of a people, of its being truly civilised, in intellect and spirit as well as in prosperity, when it recognises, as it were intuitively, its great men, puts them forward at once as rulers, and obeys their guidance. It is a proof of its failing power, of its retrogression, of its diseased condition, when it neglects, despises, or kills its great men. Of this proposition, for the two are one, history supplies a thousand instances. For the man of noble genius, the prophet, or whatever else you call him, is the test of the nation. He exists not only to do his own active work, but to passively prove what is true gold or false; and as many as he saves he dooms. Those are lost who reject him—the whole nation is lost if the whole nation rejects him—for it is not he so much whom it rejects as the saving ideas of which he is the vehicle.

Hence, when such a man appears, the question on which hangs the fate of the people is this: Will the nation recognise him or not; will it envy and destroy him, or believe in him and follow him?

That question which has again and again been placed before the nations of the world was placed in the most complete manner before the Jews at the appearance of Christ, the perfect Man—is placed in Him before each of us as individual men—since He was not only the representation of that which was noblest in the Jewish nation, but of that which is noblest in humanity. Christ was the test of the Jewish nation, and His rejection by them proved that they were lost as a nation. Christ is the test of each of us, and our acceptance or rejection of Him proves that we are worthy or unworthy of our humanity. This passive unconscious work of Christ was recognised by the wisdom of the old man Simeon when he said, "This Child is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel." It was recognised by Christ Himself in many of His parables, notably when He said, "For judgment," *i.e.*, for division, for sifting of the chaff from the wheat, "am I come into the world."

And so it was, wherever He went He was the touchstone of men. Those who were pure, single-eyed, and true-hearted saw Him, clung to Him, and loved Him; those who were conscious of their need and sin, weary of long searching after rest and not finding, weary of conventionalities and hypocrisies, believed in Him, drank deep of His Spirit, and found redemption and repose. They flew to Him as naturally as steel to the magnet. Those who were base of heart or false of heart, proud of their sin, or hardened in their prosperous hypocrisy, men who worshipped the mummy of a past religion, naturally hated Him, recoiled from Him, and, to get rid of Him, hanged Him on a tree.

In doing so—and this was the deed of the mass of the people—they destroyed their nationality which was hidden in their reception of Christ. It is at least a curious coincidence with this view, that when the priesthood before Pilate openly rejected Christ as king, they did it in these words—words which repudiated their distinct existence as a nation—"We have no king but Cæsar."

He did nothing overt to produce this. He simply lived His life, and it acted on the Jewish world as an electric current upon water; it separated its elements.

It will not be without interest to dwell upon some of the reasons which caused this rejection of Christ among the Jews, and to show how the reasons of the rejection or acceptance of Christ are not primarily to be found in certain spiritual states or feelings which belong to a transcendental region into which men of the world cannot or do not care to enter, but in elements of action and thought which any man may recognise at work in the world around him, and in his own heart; in reasons which are identical with those which cause a nation to reverence or neglect its really great men, to lead a noble or an ignoble life.

The first of these is *devotion to the conventional*.

It is practically identical with want of individuality, one of the most painful deficiencies in our present society.

Now the rectification of that evil lies at the root of Christianity. Christ came to proclaim and to ensure the distinct life, the originality, of each man. All the principles He laid down, all the teaching of His followers as recorded in the Epistles, tend to produce individuality, rescue men from being mingled up, indistinguishable atoms, with the mass of men; teach them that they possess a distinct character, which it is God's will to educate; distinct gifts, which God the Spirit will inspire and develope; a peculiar work for which each man is elected, and in performing which his personality will become more and more defined.

Now the spirit of the world, when it is conventional—and when is it not?—is in exact opposition to this. Its tendency is to reduce all men and women to one pattern, to level the landscape of humanity to a dead plain, to clip all the trees which are growing freely, "of their own divine vitality," into pollards, to wear all individuality down into uniformity. There must be nothing original—in the world's language, eccentric, erratic; men must desire nothing strongly, think nothing which the generality do not think, have no strongly outlined character. The influence of society must be collective, it must reject as a portion of it the influence of any marked individuality. Custom is to be lord and king; nay, despot. We must all dress in the same way, read the same books, talk of the same things; and when we change, change altogether, like Wordsworth's cloud, "which moveth altogether if it move at all." We do not object to progress, but we do object to eccentricity. Society must not be affronted by originality. It is a rudeness. It suggests that society might be better, that there may be an imperfection here or there. Level everybody, and then let us all collectively advance, but no one must leave the ranks or step to the front.

This is the spirit which either cannot see, or, seeing, hates men of genius. They are in conflict with the known and accredited modes of action. They do not paint pictures in the manner of the ancients, nor judge political events in accordance with public opinion, nor write poems which the customary intellect can understand, nor lead a political party according to precedent. They are said to shock the world; as if that was not the very best thing which could happen to the world. So it comes to pass that they are depreciated and neglected; or, if they are too great and persist, persecuted and killed. And, indeed, it is

not difficult to get rid of them, for you have only to increase the weight of the spirit of custom and bring it to bear upon them, and that will settle the question, for men of genius cannot breathe in this atmosphere, it kills them ; the air must be natural in which they live, and the society must be free. The pitiable thing in English society now is, not only the difficulty of an original man existing in it, but that society is in danger of becoming of so dreadful a uniformity that no original man can be developed in it at all. This, if anything, will become the ruin of England's greatness.

There is, it is true, a kind of re-action going on at present against this tyranny of society. Young men and women, weary of monotonous pleasures, are in rebellion, but the whole social condition has been so degraded that they rush into still more artificial and unnatural pleasures and excitements ; in endeavouring to become free, they enslave themselves the more.

Those who might do much, do little. It is one of the advantages of wealth and high position that those who possess them may initiate the uncustomary without a cry being raised against them. But even with every opportunity, how little imagination do they ever display, how little invention, how little they do to relieve the melancholy uniformity of our pleasures, or the intense joylessness of our work !

Now this was precisely the spirit of the Jewish religious world at the time of Christ. Men were bound down to a multitude of fixed rules and maxims ; they were hedged in on all sides. It was all arranged how they were to live and die, to repent and make atonement, to fast and pray, to believe and to worship, to dress and move. It was the most finished conventionalism of religion, in spite of the different sects, which the world has ever seen.

Then came Christ, entirely original, proclaiming new ideas, or, at least, old truths in a new form, making thoughts universal which had been particular, overthrowing worn-out ceremonies, satirising and denouncing things gray with the dust of ages, letting in the light of truth into the chambers where the priests and lawyers spun their webs of theology to ensnare the free souls of men, trampling down relentlessly the darling customs of the old conservatism, shocking and bewildering the religious society. And they were dismayed and horrified.

He did not keep, they said, the Sabbath day. He ate and drank—abominable iniquity !—with publicans and sinners. He allowed a fallen woman to touch Him. Worse still, He did not wash His hands before He ate bread. He did not teach as the scribes did. He did not live the time-honoured and ascetic life of a prophet. He dared to speak against the priesthood and the aristocracy ; He associated with fishermen. He came from Nazareth : that was enough ; no good could come from Nazareth. He was a carpenter's son, and illiterate, and no prophet was made, or could be made, out of such materials. And this man ! He dares to disturb us, to contest our maxims, to set at nought our customs, to array Himself against our despotism. " Come, let us kill Him " ; and so they crucified Him. The conventional spirit of society in Jerusalem, that was one of the murderers of Christ : they did not see, the wretched men, that in murdering Him they murdered their nation also.

So far for this conventional spirit as that which hinders the development or obstructs the work of genius, and as that which, in strict analogy with its work to-day, killed the Prince of Life long ago in Jerusalem ; let me take the question now out of the realm of thought and history, and apply it practically.

Ask yourselves two questions : first, what would be the fate of Christ if He were suddenly to appear as a teacher in the middle of London, as He did of old in the middle of Jerusalem ? — How would our orthodox religious society and

our conventional social world receive Him? Desiring to speak with all reverence He would horrify the one by His heterodox opinions, as they would be called; the other by His absolute carelessness and scorn of many of the very palladia of society. Supposing He were to denounce—as He would in no measured terms—our system of caste; attack, as He did of old in Judæa, our most cherished maxims about property and rights; live in opposition to certain social rules, receiving sinners, and dining with outcasts; tear away the flimsy veil of words whereby we excuse our extravagance, our vanity, our pushing for position; condemn with scorn our accereditated hypocrisies, which we think allowable because they make the surface of society smooth; like among us His free, bold, unconventional, outspoken life; how should we receive Him? It is a question which it is worth while that society should ask itself.

I trust more would hail His advent than we think. I believe the time is come when men are sick of falsehood, sick of the tyranny of custom, sick of living in unreality; that they are longing for escape, longing for a new life and a new order of things, longing for some fresh ideas to come and stir, like the angel, the stagnant pool. What is the meaning of the vague hopes everywhere expressed about the new Parliament? It really means that England is anxious for a more ideal, a more true and serious life, a reformed society.

Again, to connect this first question with the religious world: suppose Christ were to come now and proclaim in Scotland that the Sabbath was made for man, or to preach the Sermon on the Mount as the full revelation of God to men accustomed to hear the Gospel scheme discussed each Sunday; in the first case He would be persecuted as an infidel, and in the second as a heretic. Supposing He were now to speak against sacerdotal pretension, or the worship of the letter of the Bible; against a religion which sought to gain life from minute observances, or against a Sadducean denial of all that is spiritual (a tendency of the religious liberals of to-day), as strongly and as sharply as He spoke at Jerusalem, how would He escape? The religious world could not crucify Him, but they would open on Him the tongue of persecution.

I believe there are thousands who would join themselves to Him, thousands more than recognised Him in Judæa—for the world has advanced indeed since then—thousands of true men from among all religious bodies, and thousands from among those who are now plentifully sprinkled with the epithets of rationalists, infidels, heretics, and atheists; but there are thousands who call themselves by His name who would turn from Him in dismay or in dislike, who would neglect or persecute Him, for He would come among our old conservatisms of religion, among our doctrinal systems and close creeds, superstitions, false liberalism, priesthoods, and ritualisms, as He came of old among them all in Jerusalem, like lightning, to consume and wither everything false, retrograde, conventional, restricted, uncharitable, and superstitious; to kindle into life all that is living, loving, akin to light and full of truth within our religious world. If we *could* accept the revolution He would make, our national religion would be saved, if not it would be enervated by the blow and die.

Brethren, we ought, realising these things as members of society, or members of any religious body—realising, I say, Christ speaking to us as He would speak now—to feel our falseness, and, in the horror of it, to act like men who have discovered a traitor in their camp, whom they must destroy or themselves perish. We may save our nation if we resolve, each one here for himself, to free ourselves from cant, and formalism, and superstition, to step into the clear air of freedom, individuality, and truth, to live in crystal uprightness of life and holiness of heart.

And lastly, ask yourselves this second question, how far the spirit of the world, as devotion to conventionality, to accredited opinion, is preventing you personally from receiving Christ ?

Is your sole aim the endeavour to please your party, running after it into that which you feel as evil, as well as that which you feel as good ; forfeiting your Christian individuality as a son of God, that you may follow in the wake of the public opinion of your party ? Is that your view of manly duty ? Then you cannot receive Christ, for He demands that you should be true to your own soul.

Are you permitting yourself to chime in with the low morality of the day, to accept the common standard held by the generality, repudiating, as if it were a kind of Christian charity to do so, the desire to be better than your neighbours, and so coming at last to join in the light laugh with which the world treats social immoralities, reckless extravagance, the dishonesty of trade or the dishonesty of the exchange, or the more flagrant shame, dishonesty, and folly which adorn the turf—letting evils take their course because society does not protest as yet, till gradually the evils appear to you at first endurable, and then even beautiful, being protected by the deities of Custom and Fashion, which we enthrone instead of God ? Are you drifting into such a state of heart ? If so, you cannot expect to be able to receive Christ, for He demands that life should be ideal ; not only moral, but Godlike ; not the prudence of silence about evil, but the imprudence of bold separation from evil.

And, leaving much behind, to come home to the inner spiritual life, is your religion only the creature of custom, not of conviction ; only conventional, not individual ? Have you received and adopted current opinions because they are current, without inquiry, without interest, without any effort of the soul—orthodox because it is the fashion to be orthodox, or heterodox because it is the fashion to be heterodox ? How can you receive Christ ?—for where He comes He claims reality, the living energy of interest, the passion of the soul for light and progress. You must be born again ; born out of a dead, Pharisaic, conventional form of religion into a living individual union with the life of God.

The true religious life comes of a clear realisation of our distinct personal relation to God. The views of society, the accredited opinions of the Church on religion, the true man does not despise ; he seeks to understand them, for perhaps they may assist him in his endeavours ; but he does not follow them blindly, he puts them even aside altogether, that he may go straight to God, and find God for himself, and as a *person* know that God is his, and that he is God's. His faith is secure, because he has won it by conquest of objections, because he has reached it through the overthrow of doubt, because he has proved it in trial and found it strong. He has come at truth by personal thought, reflection, by personal struggle against falsehood, through the passion and effort of his soul. His love of Christ is not a mere religious phrase, it is a reality. He has applied the principles of the Redeemer's life and words to his own life ; to the movements of the world ; as tests and direction in the hours of trial, when duties clash, or when decision is demanded ; and he has found them answer to the call. He has studied the Saviour's character and meditated on His life, and of conviction he has chosen Him as the highest object of his worship, as the ideal to which he aspires.

Prayer is no form of words to him ; he has known and proved its power to bring his soul into blest communion with the Highest. He does not hesitate to speak the truth, for he feels that he is inspired of God.

Such a man's religion is not conventional, has no fear, is not superstitious ; it is individual, it is *his*, inwoven with his life, part of his being ; nay, it is his being. He is consciously at one with God. He has freely, with all the faculties of his humanity, received Christ Jesus.

Stephen's Dying Vision

BY REV. P. C. PURVES.

"Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost," &c.—Acts vii. 55.

I. WHAT IT WAS HE SAW.

1. He saw the Heavens opened. The Eternal was to Stephen no more unseen—real only to his faith—he was privileged even before he entered it to look into the Land of Spirits. And not merely to get a glimpse of it, but to see it near and accessible; to have evidence of what many things indicate even to us, that it is not in every sense and always "a land very far off," but is rather in close contact with the earth, surrounding it, overshadowing it, controlling it, having help for it, waiting to receive from it its prepared souls, standing ready to admit and shelter, and be a home to earth's outcasts, if they are also Christ's accepted friends.

2. He saw the glory of God. Whenever the Heavens are opened the glory of God is seen. That is what fills all the heavenly regions. We are told in the final picturing of it, in the Book of Revelation, that "it has the glory of God," and that "the glory of God doth lighten it."

But what Stephen saw was, I take it, more than the general pervading of Heaven by the brightness of the Divine glory. I think it was the concentration of all glory at the Throne. He saw the place of the Divine residence and the symbol of the Divine Presence there—so saw that, as to be assured beyond all question, just when he needed the great assurance most, that God is a Living Being and a Mighty One.

3. He saw, above all, most clearly and best of all, "Jesus standing on the Right Hand of God." Stephen had heard Him spoken of, and himself had doubtless preached Him, as "seated on the Right Hand of God"—in the position of rest and dignity; and that was true. But in this hour Stephen sees Jesus uprisen from His seat in glory; and that, too, was true, and a very precious truth to him then; for that action and attitude betokened on the part of the uprisen One keen interest in what was happening on earth—that He was watching His suffering servant with a jealous eye—that He was ready in a fit moment to intervene on his behalf—that He waited to welcome him home, when the sore fight was finished. His standing showed Him as the active Priest upon His throne, and was the visible proclamation that He was eager and able to save to the uttermost.

This Stephen saw. It riveted his gaze. It filled his heart, and well it might; for it testified beyond all words that his Lord and Saviour was Divine. None else could have lived in that sacred spot—at the right hand of God, within the inaccessible light, beside the Presence which no man can approach unto. Stephen felt this so deeply, he realised it so certainly, that as he looked on Jesus he dared—yes, amid the open Heavens, with the Divine glory blazing down—he dared to kneel to Him, to pray to Him, to call Him Lord.

But equally might that which Stephen saw rivet his eyes and fill his heart, because it made so patent that his Divine Lord was ever human, too. That was so conspicuous, and came so home to Stephen, that he made bold to do what no other disciple yet had done—to call his Master explicitly "the Son of Man."

He saw Him beside the Throne; he saw Him amid the full effulgence of Divine glory; he saw Him so certainly Divine, that before the great Father's mani-

fest Presence he fell down and worshipped Him ; and yet, through all this, he saw Him so evidently one of his own human nature, that he spake of the Glorious One as " the Son of Man." If all that was great and Divine in the aspect of his Lord assured him that there was strength in Him which might be trusted without a qualm, even in that supreme moment of agony and need ; so, doubtless, this unmistakable human form and face of His awoke and kept alive the childlike confidence that there was permission to take hold of the Omnipotent strength, that he was welcome to seize and cling to the Divine hand, as a Brother's, warm and tender.

And was not this, after all, and is it not still, the highest glory of God ? It was the glory manifested and made winsome. Jesus in that hour represented and made known " the Father " Him even Stephen, in that moment of illumination, could not see ; but " Jesus declared him." He, looking down on His faithful servant, could say, " He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." And Stephen, looking up, could say, and so may we, " We have seen His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

II.) WHO IT WAS THAT SAW THIS VISION.

1. The man who saw the vision of glory was the man with the Angel face pure, calm, and heavenly. None of the men around could see it, who all had demon faces of hate and pride and scorn.

2. The man who saw the vision of glory was the man who was full of the Holy Ghost. That day and evermore it is only this great Living Light of God that can strengthen and illumine man's sin-sealed eyes to look upon divine and eternal things. " The pure in heart, they see God "; and who are thus pure in heart except such as the Holy Spirit cleanses ?

3. The man who saw the vision of glory was the man who steadfastly looked up towards Heaven—that is, the man of heavenly-mindedness, the man of faith. Stephen's steadfast, upward look meant all that. It meant abstractedness from earth. It meant eager desire towards the region and the things he gazed upon. It meant strong faith—faith already planted in his heart, living and vigorous long ere now. Only to such a bold believer had Jesus made the gracious promise here so signally fulfilled. " Believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these. Verily, verily, hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

But it also meant the old faith living, and in specially lively exercise, at that very hour. It meant that this man had kept the faith till now, amid all vicissitudes and fiery trials of his hard career, and that now in this, his sorest ordeal, he was still by faith " enduring, as seeing Him Who is invisible."

4. Again, the man who saw the vision of glory was a man upon the edge of death, and on whom had fallen death's strange illumination.

I do not say that there and then alone are such sights possible as Stephen saw. But at all events this is certain, that it is in that hour of nature's utmost weakness, and of most solemn anxiety and awful issue, that the comfort of such a vision is chiefly needed ; and, therefore, we should not wonder that He Who, as a Father, knows and regards His children's need, should keep it till then, and send it then.

When, in all Stephen's militant life and manifold trials, did he so greatly need the upholding and cheer of such a sight of heavenly things as now, when he stood on trial before the Council, or knelt on the field of death among them that stoned him ? God knew when to give this great help to His servant. It came at the right time, in the hour of need. As his day was, so was the strength given him from above.

Would you fain anticipate this unspeakable privilege and comfort at the last? I do not absolutely promise it, but I say it is possible; and the likeliest way to obtain it is to prepare for it by a steadfast, upward looking even now, and ever henceforth—a beholding of Jesus with the eye of faith—a seeing of the glory of God in His face, and a realising of Heaven as His Father's house and yours.

That will best fit you to see and bear the vision of glory if it should be granted when you are quitting this earthly scene. And if it should not, if it should be reserved till you actually enter the opened Heavens, still assuredly to you thus prepared, it shall come then; and you will have for compensation, in missing the earlier sight, a share of that higher blessedness of which the Master spake: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

III.) WHAT THE SEEING OF THE VISION DID FOR THE MAN WHO SAW IT.

It was not a mere spectacle. It could not be so. It wrought great results, and they were good. It quite absorbed and enraptured him. It raised him above all that was about him. It brought back the Angel face upon him in spite of all his agony.—It did more, it overspread him with an aspect and a bearing altogether Christ-like.

1. It led him to bold confession of his Lord. He knew that death would be the penalty of that. But he could not keep silence. He broke out and cried aloud, "Behold, I see the Heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God!" It was Stephen's final testimony to his Master in one dying word. It was his last preaching of the Gospel of Christ, to which he had given his whole living strength.

2. It made him most Christ-like. Stephen shared and showed forth in that hour the chiefest graces of Jesus Christ, His faith, His charity, His prayerfulness, His peace.

3. He was filled with the strongest trust. He gave its highest exercise clear and conspicuous exhibition. He met its last and hardest demand. Even as his Lord had done, and in His very language he died in faith, and dying, gave over his spirit into hands Divine.

4. He was filled with the rarest love. At the last, and in the most testing of all circumstances, he obeyed his Lord's most hard, His seemingly impossible command, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

5. Then also and over all the vision gave him peace, even Christ's own peace. In the least peaceful of surroundings—when all was wild passion and tempest on every side—the peace of God passing all understanding kept his heart and mind. What he saw made his death—and such a death—to be to him none other than a sleep, a blessed sleep, to which he freely, fearlessly, desirously, resigned himself. It was a rough passing to the River Side he had; but the passage through was safe, yea sweet. The Jordan was divided for him, and he went over dry-shod. The bed was very hard that he had to lie down on, and violent was his rocking there; for "they cast him out of the city and stoned him." But on that cold earth, and under these cruel stones, "he fell asleep calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Such were the effects the vision wrought on him who saw it. Then were they not great, and good, and holy, even as itself? Did they not well complete the man's needed preparation for his immediate entering on all the glory it unfolded—that crowned all?

As he looked steadfastly upwards he went to Jesus. He who saw the Lamb on the Mount Sion rose then to join the band of His followers there, and to walk

with Him for evermore in white, as one of the chief of the worthy ones ; and Jesus, Whom he had seen standing on the Right Hand of God, stood still no longer. He hastened down, He came to receive the trustful soul to Himself, and bring him to His prepared place in the opened Heavens. And so then and now and to eternity, where the glorious Master is, there the steadfast looker—the good and faithful servant—is ever with the Lord.

Who that has looked upon such a scene would not wish with all his heart that his last end might be like this ?

Well, brethren, it is in its substance, in the best of it, attainable by any of us all.

But if we would have it so, we must begin like Stephen. The life shapes the death—the end answers to the beginning. We must, like that man, be full of the Spirit and of faith now, if we would have the Spirit open our eyes at the end, to look into Heaven as our Home, and if we would be able then, as faith's last effort, to resign our departing spirits into the hands of Jesus as our Saviour. If we would see the Lamb in the midst of the Father's Throne when our darkest moment comes, and seeing Him go boldly and gladly to Him through the Gates of Death, we must qualify ourselves for that, by now beholding the Lamb on the Cross, there taking away the sin of the world, and yours and mine.

The Rapture of St. Stephen

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost," &c.—Acts vii. 55, 56.

The particular form of this remarkable vision was adjusted (as indeed all God's Revelations are) to the associations and circumstances of the person to whom it was vouchsafed. Divine manifestations are always significant to those to whom they are made, fasten upon something in their fortunes or thoughts, gather round some nucleus in their minds. To Joshua, when about to undertake the siege of Jericho, the Angel of the Lord appears as a captain girded for war ; to the wise men of the East, whose study was astronomy, the Revelation of our Lord's Birth is made by a star ; to St. Peter and his partners in the fishing trade a sign of Christ's Divine Power is given by a miraculous draught of fishes. We find in St. Stephen's vision something analogous. Though a Hellenist, he was a Jew by religion, familiar with the Jewish ritual. The scene of his trial was probably a court of the Temple ; and the trial took place before the high priest. Now every Jew was familiar with the history of the Shechinah, that blaze of glory enveloped in a cloud, which under the first Temple had been visible over the mercy-seat between the cherubim, and which at Solomon's dedication of the house had shone forth with such extraordinary brilliancy that we are told that "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud ; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." Every Jew, moreover, was familiar with the functions of the high priest on the great day of the Atonement, in executing which he passed with a fuming censer, and with the blood of the sin-offering, through the veil or curtain which separated the holy of holies from the holy place, and there stood in the immediate presence-chamber of God. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains to us the beautiful symbolism of these Divine Ordinances, teaching us that the holy of holies is a figure of the highest Heaven ; that the veil is a figure of the human nature of Christ, which was rent asunder by death ; that the passage of the high priest

into the inmost sanctuary is a figure of our Lord's passage into Heaven, through and after the rending of His humanity by death; that the blood is typical of His Atonement, which He pleads for us on high.

Now, with all this temple-imagery in his mind, and with the interpretation of it supplied to him by the Holy Spirit, of which he was full, Stephen sees the Shechinah in the heavenly sanctuary, and sees also the High Priest standing before God to intercede for the human race, of which, as the Son of Man, He is the Head and Representative.

But again, the mind of the holy martyr was full of his Master's words, and specially of those words which had been spoken by the Lord in circumstances similar to his own. When adjured by the high priest to say explicitly whether or not He was the Christ, the Son of God, our Lord had replied in these accents of solemn warning, which His followers had laid to heart, and which doubtless had been reported to Stephen: "Thou hast said" (an affirmation that He *was* the Son of God), "nevertheless, I say unto you" (let not My present appearance as a criminal at your bar throw discredit on My words—My present humiliation notwithstanding), "hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man" (surrounded by very different circumstances) "sitting on the Right Hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." Thus did our Lord connect Himself with the remarkable prophecy of Daniel, and assert that in Him it should find its fulfilment: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of Heaven," &c. Now, when Stephen announces to this same Council, not long after, "Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God," it is as if he had said: "Lo, His words are fulfilled, which so recently He spake in your hearing. What Daniel saw in vision, I now see actually accomplished. I see your late Victim, Whom ye spat upon with contempt, and delivered Him to the Gentiles, to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him, crowned with glory and honour, and at the Right Hand of God."

Thus we seem to have made out two aspects of this vision of St. Stephen's. It was a ravishing glimpse into the heavenly realities, of which the Temple Service and the Jewish Ritual were but a shadow. And it was a confession of Christ before those who had crucified Him, in the very face of their prejudices. But, finally, it was a consolation and support to the first martyr himself, under the ordeal of martyrdom then imminent. Upon this aspect of it we must now say a few words.

We have already referred to the passage in which our Lord had warned the Jews that they should see Him *sitting* on the Right Hand of Power. Stephen sees Him, and testifies that he sees Him, *standing*. The difference of posture is most significant. The *Jews* were to see Christ *seated* on the Right Hand of Power, because they were to see Him as their Judge; and the judge sits on the judgment-seat, the criminal standing before him. But His faithful disciple and witness sees Him *standing*, "as ready to assist him, as ready to plead for him, as ready to receive him." The peculiar form the vision took was to encourage and console the disciple. Usually our Lord is pictured as enthroned on the Right Hand of God. But to Stephen, about to face death, and urgently in need of Divine support, this posture would not have been significant of sympathy and succour. A person who sits still while contemplating the sufferings of another gives an impression of being indifferent to those sufferings, of being not unwilling that they should take their course. One who rises up and advances towards us shows that he hears our cry, and sympathizes with our trouble. "As ready to *plead* for him." There was an affecting contrast, made visible to the

disciple, between things earthly and things heavenly. The earthly high priest sat before him as a judge, fury painted on his countenance, and condemned him. The Heavenly High Priest, though indeed our appointed Judge, before Whose judgment-seat we must all be made manifest, yet here appears in the more comfortable character as an Advocate before God the Judge of all—the character which the beloved disciple exhibits when he says, “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Stephen was a sinner; and in proportion to the fulness of grace within him would be his susceptibility to his sins. How deeply consolatory that his Master should appear to him in his last moments, not in the aspect of Judge, but of Pleader, One in Whose hands his cause as a sinner might be safely reposed, One Who answers all pleas against His beloved ones by exhibiting the wounds in His hands, and feet, and side. “As ready to receive him.” Our Lord had bequeathed to His disciples this consolatory assurance, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Fulfilling these words to the eye of His first martyr, He appears as rising from His Throne to welcome and embrace him, as advancing towards him with open arms, and saying: “Come, for all things are now ready.” A visible assistance, and a visible advocacy, and a visible welcome, what could the first martyr need more to support him under his imminent trial?

The first soul which was called to encounter death for Christ's sake needed, doubtless, this extraordinary succour. Stephen was about to tread a path which had never been trodden before; although many had incurred loss of character and worldly goods, life had not yet been sacrificed on the faith of the promises of Jesus. It was otherwise with St. James, the brother of St. John, and one of the three favoured disciples, who witnessed the Transfiguration and the Agony. His martyrdom, which is cursorily noticed in chapter xii., was not attended with any vision; his faith doubtless pierced through the veil of matter which screens the spiritual world; but there is no reason to think that his bodily eye did so. And if anyone should be disposed to wonder at this, St. James being an Apostle and very highly favoured, let it be remembered that what had passed in St. Stephen's case must have acted as the strongest possible support to the faith of St. James. The rapture of St. Stephen, and the words of ecstasy in which he described it, words which must have been bruited abroad among the whole Christian community, must have made St. James more than willing to follow him. The Apostle would naturally fortify himself (as probably every succeeding martyr in the noble army has done) by the Deacon's experience. He would reason with himself in Herod's prison; “Stephen saw the Master ready to welcome him with open arms, as soon as the stones had done their cruel work upon his bruised body. Can I doubt that He is equally ready to welcome me, me to whom He foretold that I should drink the cup He Himself drank of, and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with? No sooner will the sword of the executioner have flashed down upon my neck, than the greetings of Him, and of my fellow-servant Stephen, will break upon my ear.”

What has been just remarked on the different circumstances of the martyrdoms of St. Stephen and St. James opens to us in an interesting manner the general plan of God's present administration of His Church. “We walk by faith,” says the Apostle, “not by sight”; and it is God's purpose to discipline us into this walk of faith. It would conflict with this purpose to make the realities of the spiritual world an object of sight to every believer; or, which would amount to very much the same thing, to give to the disciples of Christ

in every generation a series of miraculous attestations of the truth of their religion. If God should vouchsafe to each believer such a vision as He vouchsafed to St. Stephen, or if Christ should say to each one of us audibly (or in such a manner that there could be no doubt of its being His voice) what He said to St. Paul when seeking deliverance from the thorn in the flesh, there would be no longer any trial of character in faith, and the great object of our probation would be seriously interfered with. His plan therefore is to give glimpses into the spiritual world only at the outset of a Dispensation, to stigmatise particular crimes, on the first instance of their occurrence, by miraculous punishments, and to crown great spiritual exploits at their first performance with miraculous marks of favour; and then, having caused these things to be put on record, to leave the record of them to speak for itself to after ages, and to support the faith and hope of future generations. The Apostles frequently saw their risen Master. St. Stephen, St. Paul, and St. John enjoyed glimpses of His glory after the Resurrection. Since those days the Heavens have closed upon Him, to open no more until they roll back their golden gates, to send Him forth upon His second Advent; and accordingly His disciples can no more see Him with the eye of sense. But it is to be remembered that if our privileges are less high in this respect than those of our first fathers in the faith, the opportunity of exercising a nobler faith, and one which God will reward more amply, is offered to us. "Blessed are they who have *not* seen," said our Lord to St. Thomas, "and yet have believed." And St. Peter, implicitly commending the faith of those to whom he writes, as not having any aids of sense to lean upon, such as his own faith and that of his colleagues had been supported by, says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." If when beset on all sides by difficulties and obstacles, we can realise Christ as standing on God's Right Hand, to succour us, to plead for us, and ere long to welcome us, our faith will be more highly approved than if it pleased God to open the Heavens to us, and give us assurance of this great truth by our bodily senses.

The full consideration of our subject requires that we should make some remarks on the obtuseness of Stephen's auditors to the great and animating spectacle which he was privileged to see. Had the veil which screens the spiritual world been made as transparent to them as it was to him, they would either have been overwhelmed with shame, and fled from the council chamber in dismay, or in an agony of remorse would have thrown themselves at his feet, and implored pardon for the wrong which they thought to do him. But they are blinded by malicious fury, and can no more see the Lord than the prophet Balaam, when bent on his self-willed errand, could see the Angel who went forth to withstand him. Now in this circumstance there is something very awful. A transaction was going on in the spiritual world which intimately concerned them—indeed, to which their malignity had given rise—and yet of which they were totally unconscious. The Lord had risen up to succour and welcome him, whom they had determined to sweep from the face of the earth; and thus they were defying God, and drawing down upon their heads an aggravated condemnation. It is a solemn thought for all of us, that transactions may continually pass in the spiritual world respecting ourselves of which our senses give us no notice. Our Lord may be pleading for us that our span of life may be prolonged, and additional opportunities given us, while we are thinking of nothing else. Angels may be charged with ministries on our behalf, to deliver us from some imminent danger, or to counterplot some of the designs of the Evil One, or to make some providential arrangement of our affairs; and some great blessing which we

enjoy may be due under God to this agency; and yet we may apprehend nothing beyond the ordinary course of Nature or of Providence. The present state of the soul, immured in the body, has been compared by a good writer to the state of a bird in the egg. There is a world all around the bird of stir and movement, of light and colour, of form and sound, of ceaseless activities, both mental and physical; but a slight shell, as yet unbroken, effectually shuts out the little prisoner from all communion with this world. Our gross animal bodies resemble that slight shell. The world of spirits is vastly more full of action and intelligence, as well as vastly more beautiful, than the world we apprehend with our senses. It is close upon us, too, and encompasses us on all sides; but for the present, near as it is, so that we are in the very centre and heart of it, it is to us as if it were not. There is but one thing which can make this spiritual world a reality to us, and that is the faculty which penetrates into the unseen—Faith. God grant us that holy susceptibility to the unseen—or, in other words, that faith—which comes of being filled with the Holy Ghost; so that in every movement of Nature and Providence which concerns us, in every additional day of life, in every warning we receive, in every blessing and every relief which is allowed us, in every alteration of our circumstances, we may recognise His hand and care, and hear His voice.

We may remark finally, the exclamation of St. Stephen at the moment of his rapture is a Confession of Faith. Few and brief as they are, his words are a creed, expressing that fundamental article of the Christian religion, for which he was about to lay down his life: "Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God."

Here, first of all, is the humanity of our Blessed Lord, and the relationship which He bears to all of us in virtue of His having taken our nature in its earliest germ and rudiment, "before it received any personal configuration"; for He is called *Son of Man*; and not *a*, but *the* Son of Man. His Divinity is no less certainly implied in the words; for He is said to stand on the Right Hand of God—a position of honour to which not even the highest mere creature can aspire; for the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews pointedly excludes the Angels from such dignity: "*To which of the Angels said He at any time, Sit on My Right Hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?*" The atoning sufferings of our Lord are also implied; for the Son of Man is here spoken of as exalted; and St. Paul directly connects His exaltation with His previous humiliation and passion: "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. *Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him." Finally, we have "the Heavens opened" to a sinful child of man, in connexion with this glorious spectacle. "Behold, I see the Heavens opened." Thus is implied the mediatorial character of the Man Christ Jesus; that He is the true Jacob's ladder, which spans the distance between Heaven and earth, through Whom alone our prayers ascend to God, and His blessings reach us; according to that word of His own, "Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Thus, that no point, even of form, might be wanting to make him a true martyr, Stephen witnesses the good confession before God, and Angels, and men; and thereupon, for that testimony, is put to death.

May we find grace to feed and nourish our souls daily on the truth, which he sealed with his blood, the union of the Manhood with the Godhead in the Person of our glorified Redeemer. We have the nearest possible interest (by community of nature) in the great High Priest Who is passed into the Heavens;

"We are members," says St. Paul, "of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." He has carried up with Him into Heaven the marks of His Passion, and the still more indelible marks, which the painful experience of human life has left upon His mind. Let us approach Him in full assurance of His sympathy, as an High Priest, Who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; let us believe that according to a profound law of the human mind, what He endured for our sakes has served still more to endear us to Him; and let us appeal to Him by His Agony and Bloody Sweat, by His Cross and Passion, to come to our aid in every trial, and to welcome us, when our pilgrimage is concluded, to the place which He has prepared for us among the many mansions of His Father's House.

St. Stephen

BY REV. JOHN PURCHAS, M.A.

"Behold, I see the Heavens opened," &c.—Acts vii. 56.

When was this adorable sight and most glorious manifestation vouchsafed to St. Stephen? Was it as he walked in spirit with God in the "green garden shade," when all was beautiful, all was peaceful, save the leaves gently trembling in the soft air; all was silent save the ripple of the stream and the music of the bird? Alas! no! it is not always when our days glide by beautiful and undisturbed that the Heavens are opened on our sight, or that Angels descend—it is in the night-hour of tribulation and anguish that the light which comes from above shines most clearly on our path—it is in the dark that the white wing of the Angel is best seen descending. Neither was it when he "did great wonders and miracles among the people" that he saw the Heavens opened, the power and the glory. It was not in the successful performance of his lawful avocation, but in his hour of trouble, when his work was arrested, when the daughter of Zion with a lie on her lips, and a stone instead of a sceptre in her hands, proceeded falsely to accuse and wickedly to murder—that the glory of God burst upon the upraised eyes of the Church's first martyr.

Let us now see what Holy Scripture tells us of the character and life of St. Stephen. We are informed that he was one of seven who were ordained by the Apostles for the work of a deacon, and that all these seven were "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." These qualities they all had in common, yet Stephen is particularly mentioned as being full of faith and power, and doing great wonders and miracles; is it unreasonable for us to conclude that these great qualities which all the seven deacons held in common were possessed by St. Stephen in a still more extraordinary degree? That he was indeed full of faith, his unflinching courage, and loudly expressed belief in that Name for which he died, in his last moments, sufficiently testify; and that his heart was as gentle as his faith was strong is evident from his prayer for his murderers—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" Of Stephen's life before he was a deacon we know nothing, but as he was of honest report, we may conclude that he was upright in all dealings with his neighbour; that he loved God with all his heart and with all his soul, is evident from his being full of the Holy Ghost. He was also full of wisdom, which here, doubtless implies, not only that saving wisdom—wisdom unto righteousness, but the wisdom that consists in good practical sense, which springs from a kind heart joined to a clear mind, not mere book-learning, which, though a valuable gift, is doubly so when combined with other more active ones—it was this good common sense—this practical

wisdom—which would be equally required as well as supernatural gifts for St. Stephen's office.

Of the youth and parentage of St. Stephen we know nothing ; but it is full of meaning that his name, Stephen, is by interpretation " a crown," and as the child is father of the man, we doubt not that he, who was destined to wear the crown of martyrdom, was in the days of his childhood and boyhood like his great Master, subject to his parents, and in favour with God and man — and thus his glorious death was not the reward for a single act—for such a death is an exceeding great reward—but the crown and fit ending of a life, to which every day dedicated to God naturally led.

Some have supposed, on no very sufficient grounds, that St. Stephen was one of the " seventy disciples." It is more likely that he was an Hellenistic Jew—that is, a Jew by religion, and a Gentile by descent, and one of the large body converted on the Day of Pentecost by the preaching of St. Peter. His career on being ordained a deacon is soon told. The Jews from the different synagogues out of Palestine enraged against him, not only from the loss to their body of so eminent a person as St. Stephen, but also by reason of the miracles and wonders which he did, lost no opportunity of contending violently with him ; and not being able to dispute the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake, they brought a false accusation against him—and thus he was stoned to death by the murderers of our Lord, and thereby he first received the crown, answering to his name, of the victorious martyrs of Christ.

All that remains for us now is to contemplate the closing scene of the life of this blessed Saint and Martyr. He is brought before the Sanhedrin, or council of the Jews, to answer to the charge of blasphemy against the temple and the law. He is at least to have the form of trial—in reality a mock trial—granted to him. Up rises a false witness and says, " This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place," &c. The words were scarcely spoken when the same Light that shone on the face of Moses, whose name had been so wickedly used for so base a purpose, shone from the face of St. Stephen, as if to rebuke the false witness ; and all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel. Surely this was as plain an interposition of God's power to rebuke sin, as when Belshazzar with God's hallowed altar-cup in his sacrilegious hand cowered at the handwriting on the wall, or when the wrath of Heaven blasted Ananias with the lie yet fresh upon his lips. But the high priest—unconvinced by the angelic splendour flashing from the face of St. Stephen—said, " Are these things so ? " Then in answer St. Stephen began his fine oration, the object of which appears to have been to set forth historically the scheme of the Jewish dispensation, and the consummation of that design in Christ—but he was not allowed to finish it, for the people, being cut to the heart, gnashed upon him with their teeth. At this moment St. Stephen looked up towards Heaven and saw the Throne of the Eternal, and Jesus standing on the Right Hand of God—not in dream, trance, or vision, but in very reality. And if it be said, why did not the Jews see it also, if it were a reality and not a vision ? it may be answered that the Bible says so, and that is sufficient. But if we must give a reason for the faith that is in us, is it incredible that God, Who made the eye, could endue it with power to pierce far beyond the blue sky, far beyond sun and star, yea, up to the very Heaven of Heavens ? This miraculous range of sight might well be given to a man full of the Holy Ghost, looking up steadfastly into Heaven, but is it probable that it would also be bestowed upon his perjured murderers ?

One thing is very remarkable in the sight vouchsafed to St. Stephen: it is the only passage in Holy Writ where our Blessed Lord is spoken of as *standing* on the Right Hand of God—He is generally spoken of as *sitting* on the Right Hand. Whereupon it has been remarked that to sit is the posture of one who judges, to stand, that of one who helps. Our Lord therefore appeared to His martyr, not as the Judge, but as the Helper, and accordingly helped him not only to suffer for righteousness' sake, but to look upon those furious Jews as brothers, and even to pray for them. "Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." The Jews would hear no more, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him; and he died, but not before uttering two memorable sentences—the first, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" A noble testimony to the true faith dying men do not say what they do not believe—and so he, the saint and martyr, commends his departing spirit to Him for Whom he lived, and for Whom he was dying.

The second sentence—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." An echo as it were of His voice Who cried on Mount Calvary, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do!" Yes, we must sit at the feet of Jesus, and not in the glare of the world, but under the shadow of the Cross, if we would learn true nobility, devoted heroism, sublime forgiveness of wrong, patient endurance, Faith that never wavers, Love that never fails, yea, and every good thing that poor human nature can compass.

Such was the end of St. Stephen. His murderers who laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul, resumed their garments and went their way. And was the martyr's mangled corpse left a prey to the beast of the field, and to the fowl of the air? No: God Who sent the ravens to the prophet, and miraculously filled the widow's cruse of oil, does not forsake His servants even in death, when the tyranny is overpast. And devout men carried St. Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. From his hallowed grave the murdered Saint being dead yet speaketh; and his message to us is this, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you," as said our Blessed Lord before him. Thus we see, that every good, true, noble and godly thing is to be found in those three-and-thirty years which separate the stable at Bethlehem from the Cross on Mount Calvary, and every man's life, inasmuch as it is a Christian life, is in some sort a repetition, however dim and imperfect, of the life of our Blessed Lord. Such is the moral that the voice of the saint and martyr Stephen teaches from that grave where the devout men laid him.

The Vision of St. Stephen

BY RIGHT REV. HARVEY GOODWIN, D.D.

"Behold, I see the Heavens opened," &c.—Acts vii. 56.

There are three points in this vision, which I will in a few words bring before your notice. In the first place, you will observe that Jesus Christ is represented as in *glory*, in that glory which He had with the Father before the world was; little is said of the nature of the glory, it is simply declared that Stephen saw Jesus Christ standing *at the Right Hand of God*; it is manifest that there must be in this description something figurative, because although the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity might be visible as man, we have no reason to suppose of the Father that that description has ever been departed from, "that He

dwelleth in light which no man can approach, Whom no man hath seen nor can see"; I should suppose, therefore, that the expression "the Right Hand of God" is intended to imply that so vivid a perception of the glory of Christ was conveyed to the mind of Stephen, that he could express it in no other way than by using that same figure which Christ had used Himself, "the Right Hand of God." In whatever manner the impression was conveyed to St. Stephen's mind, it is certain that the meaning of the vision could be no other than this, to make the martyr perceive in a moment of great trial, when his faith might be likely to give way, that He in Whom he believed and for faith in Whom he died, was in very deed exalted to power and exceeding great glory.

Secondly, I would have you notice that the Lord Jesus is represented as "standing" at the Right Hand of God. The expression cannot but contrast itself in our minds with the more usual phrase, according to which Jesus is said to have "sat down" at God's Right Hand; and beyond doubt to sit down by the Throne of God, after having accomplished His work on earth, is a form of speech in general more suitable than that used in St. Stephen's vision, for it expresses rest from labour after the work is done: to have left the bosom of the Father, to have assumed human form, to have undergone all the trials of humanity, even death itself, then to have burst the bonds of death, to have ascended into Heaven, and to have *sat down* at the Right Hand of the Majesty on high—this sketch of the condescending work of Christ, terminating in glory, appears to express clearly, though figuratively, the whole course of our Saviour's life, from the time when He came from God until the time when He went to God again; and I believe that in no other instance is the expression "*standing* at the Right Hand of God" used, instead of that which seems so much more obvious and natural. Yet when St. Stephen was about to suffer martyrdom the change of posture attributed to the Saviour would not be without great significance and admirable comfort; conveying as it would the thought that the heart of Christ in Heaven was moved by the death of His servant on earth, that He would not sit unmoved while the blood of His martyr was being shed, that He was waiting as it were to receive him, that He had risen from His place to meet and welcome him, and that when he gave up his spirit Christ would be ready to receive it.

But thirdly, I would have you notice that this vision of St. Stephen is the first occasion upon which the Lord is spoken of in the New Testament, by any other excepting Himself, as the "*Son of Man*." Simple as the expression may seem, it means very much, implying as it does that Jesus had not put aside His human body, and therefore not His human heart and human feelings, implying that Jesus Christ was the head of the human race and its representative in Heaven for evermore; speaking as it does in the most forcible manner of Christ as the Mediator and Advocate, and as being qualified for such an office by the union of the Godhead and the manhood in Him. And of this I feel sure, that the expression "Son of Man" was no chance expression with St. Stephen himself; it would be with a full conviction of the solemnity of the act, that he would venture for the first time to utter a name, hitherto used by Christ's lips alone; overwhelmed as he might be with a sense of the glory revealed to him, joyful as he might feel at the support given to his faith by the exhibition of the majesty of Him in Whom he believed, there would be one circumstance in the vision which would still more impress his mind, and that would be the eternal manhood of Christ; *then* he would feel the string of his tongue loosed, and he would be sure that it was no irreverence, but rather the attribution of the most glorious title, when he spoke of Christ as "*the Son of Man standing at the Right Hand of God*."

The vision of St. Stephen seems to teach us in those points which I have brought before you these three things, the *power* of Christ, the *willingness* of Christ, and the *sympathy* of Christ ; Jesus Christ at the *Right Hand of God* speaks very forcibly of His power, His *standing* there speaks of His readiness and willingness to help us, His being the *Son of Man* speaks of His perfect sympathy with all human weaknesses and troubles. It is the end of our faith thus to apprehend Christ ; to be able to see Him as Stephen did is the perfection of sight granted only to a few, but to see Him though it be but through a glass darkly yet at least sufficiently clearly to guide our steps and cheer our hearts, is that for which we may all hope, and which we ought not to be contented if we do not attain. Walking as we do here in an evil and dangerous world, with ten thousand snares round about us, evil lusts within us, temptations to sin and vanity and frivolity besetting us on this side and that, assured that the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, seeing everywhere the destruction which he effects, trembling though we may stand now lest we also should fall what is it that we most require ? I reply that we need that which supported Stephen, the vision of the Son of Man at God's Right Hand ; I know that our position is very different from his, and I know that in many respects it is far more dangerous ; he was wrestling against flesh and blood, the malice of a few Jews who at most could but kill his body was all that he had to fear—a trial of faith I admit, but he knew the worst of it, and I do not wonder that with Christ standing as a witness of his martyrdom he was able to fall asleep in faith and hope and charity ; but we wrestle with far worse enemies, spiritual enemies worse than a Jewish mob, who may kill not the body only, but the soul as well ; what is our help ? Of course our great hope is in steady and manful resistance, but it must be in a strength not our own, even in the strength of Christ ; to strive earnestly to resist the power of evil, to endeavour to grow in grace and in charity and in good works, and yet to grow in the belief that we are complete not in ourselves, but in Christ—this I conceive to be the foundation of the true Christian life. And therefore I would say that whatever tends to give us a clearer vision of Jesus Christ, as exalted to God's Right Hand, tends also to forward us in our Christian course ; it is not for the contemplative mind only that this exhibition of Christ's glory is needed, it is not the visionary, the enthusiastic mind, to which it is chiefly granted ; those who need it are they who have to press their course through this sinful world, who come in contact with its temptations, who find evil within them, and who feel their own strength to be weakness ; and those to whom the vision of Christ is chiefly granted are they who in humble faith and holy life and earnest devotion seek to know Him as He is. Dim and imperfect must that vision be, even to those whose eyes are most cleared from earthly films ; the vision of St. Stephen himself must, I apprehend, have been but a shadow, compared with that which was afterwards revealed ; but if we can only see enough and know enough of Christ, as our Saviour and Redeemer, to guide us in this present world, we may be content to wait for a more glorious vision until all things are made new.

In Touch With God

BY REV. S. H. FLEMING.

“Behold, I see the Heavens opened,” &c.—*Acts vii. 56.*

With the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the infant Church of Jesus entered upon her career of accepted conflict with the world, and settled down in the spirit of patient endurance, lit up with the conscious presence of God, and the assured

sustentation of her Redeemer, as the living witness of the new relationship opened up between earth and Heaven by the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Martyr's vision, the unveiling of God's face, the sublime disclosures of an open Heaven, the revelation to human sight of Jesus Christ in glory standing at the Right Hand of God, these are truths which have fired the breast of the Christian Church with an enthusiasm which the refinement of torture could not destroy, nor oceans of blood extinguish.

(I.) The dying Martyr's vision. What a haze of popular misapprehension surrounds the word "vision"! The whittling tendency of gross materialism has been busy here, directing its sordid energies to the unheroic task of convincing us that a "vision" is synonymous with an "hallucination." Please observe in this effort the characteristic perversion of consistency. When the Church warms her children's hearts by the glorious teaching of Christ's "real presence" in all the means of grace, but especially in the highest of them all, the Sacrament of His most precious Body and Blood, the world lays hold of the phrase "real presence," and contemptuously flings it aside, saying, "Tush, we revolt from this childish figment of a carnal presence in the Sacrament." Whilst, when the Church talks of visions, and standing with her children around the Cross of her incarnate God, says, "I see the Heavens opened and Jesus standing there," the world dismisses her testimony with the flippant sneer, "Hallucination, you know." What a veritable ringing of the changes! It is perfectly monstrous! The Church's phrase "real presence" in the Sacrament, though she has never swerved by a hair's breadth from the position of a *Spiritual* presence, is distorted into an averment involving cannibalism. Whilst, when she actually and positively sees the blessed *Form* of her Lord in His ascension Human Body, not as a spirit, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have," but standing as a Body alone could stand in glory, she is accused of mistaking a fancy for a fact, an hallucination for a vision.

II. Let us hold fast to the absolute, simple, sober fact of the literal truth of St. Stephen's vision, and all the more firmly because in it we feel fully conscious of a manifestation that is abnormal. We walk by faith, not by sight. But sight is always possible, and has from time to time been graciously vouchsafed to mortal man.

Such were the frequent visions to man in Old Testament days, the vision of angelic beings, corporeal, but of angelic corporeity. At the transfiguration and in the visions granted to St. Stephen and St. Paul—visions of the Son of God—the same principle of corporeal presence obtained. But it was no longer an angelic, but a human corporeity: "I see Jesus, born of Mary; Jesus Who was subjected to the conditions and limitations of manhood; Jesus Who was weary and hungry, Who bled and died upon the Cross." "I see the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God."

(III.) And so, indeed, the Martyr's enemies understood him. They never credited him with being the victim of a hallucination. They believed him when he said, "I see Heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God," and, believing, they lynched him. Not a voice would have been heard to denounce him, not a stone have been raised to crush out his life, had he said, "Behold, I see Heaven opened, and Abraham, or Moses, or Elijah standing at the Right Hand of God." But Jesus, the despised and rejected Nazarene, Jesus Whom they had crucified because He disappointed their earthly view of the Messianic Kingdom, was a name which pierced them to the quick. They would listen to him no longer. "They stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city." "The wild rush of the mob, judges,

populace, witnesses, and their victim, through the temple enclosure to the gate hard by was soon accomplished. A moment's pause while his murderers stripped for their deed of blood, and then the work of death began." As the stones fell heavily upon the Martyr he called upon God, and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "Another volley followed, and another prayer, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,' and then he fell asleep."

IV. Linger we for a moment by the crushed and battered form, that we, too, may realise the infinite sweetness of being "in touch with God." How different from the sensuous conceptions of heathendom! To recline at the feast of the gods was the poetic fancy for the highest felicity; to feed on ambrosia and quaff the nectar cup was deemed the fitting pastime of celestial minds, the mildest precursor of ineffable orgies, and indulgence in unparalleled sensuality. If the gods were omnipotent, their mighty sway was turned inwards in the fatal direction of self-pleasing and self-aggrandizement. The existence of mortals assumed interest for them only in proportion as the lavish hand of nature had dowered them with beauty and comeliness which might minister to celestial lusts. How different these grotesque and revolting mythologies to the vision of the Martyr! The Heavens opened, and Jesus standing at God's Right Hand. No self-pleasing, no self-aggrandisement, but seen in the attitude of help, of blessing, and of love "standing." As on earth, so in Heaven. The same Jesus in the same Divine solicitude for us. "Not being ministered unto, but ministering."

Lastly, why does the graphic narrative of the Martyr's death follow immediately upon Christmas-day, and the execrations of the unrestrained fury and brutality of a villainous mob blur with a livid streak of blood the record of the world's *renaissance*, and drown its carols with the pitiless curses of a hideous butchery? The answer comes to us in the glorious cry of Stephen, "I see Heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." The answer comes as a supreme vindication of incarnation, casting a brilliant sidelight upon the manger-bed, and the awful mystery of the Divine *kenosis*. The answer comes as a fitting sequence to the episode of ignominy and shame, ending in the harrowing scenes of Calvary. All, all was endured for us men and for our salvation. Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God explains it all. "Eight months before the Martyr had possibly gazed upon his Lord stretched in weakness upon the Cross," and now in his own mortal struggle, in the trembling, the agony of a murderous death, Heaven opens upon the rapt scene of human exaltation, "man in touch with God." The Man Christ Jesus standing at God's Right Hand to succour, to strengthen, and to bless.

✓ The First Martyrdom

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Then they cried out with a loud voice," &c.—Acts vii. 57-60.

When the Jews, full of fury against our Lord, delivered Him up to Pilate, notwithstanding the intensity of their excitement, they stood still, we are told upon a point of ceremonial. "They themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled."

A similar combination of fury with attention to small points of form—the same hatred of the truth, with the same scrupulous exactitude as to the mode of gratifying their malignity—is seen in the passage before us. The witness

which St. Stephen has borne to our Lord's exaltation throws them into a wild frenzy against him; they start from their seats in the council, to sweep the blasphemer from the face of the earth, and clap their hands to their ears, to express their abhorrence of the blasphemy they had just heard. The question has often been discussed how the account of St. Stephen's martyrdom is to be reconciled with the acknowledgment made by the Jews in our Lord's case—"It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." The truth is, that the murder of St. Stephen was a tumultuary and altogether irregular proceeding, which took place in a moment of popular excitement. No sentence was pronounced; the proceedings of the court were terminated by a sudden outbreak of fury on the part of its members, which precluded any formal end to the trial. Capital punishment the Jews could not inflict as a right; but it seems that occasionally, when they took the law into their own hands in this matter, the Imperial Government thought it politic to connive at the licence. The Jews were at all times turbulent and fanatical; and it would not have been wise, especially where they were so jealous of interference as in matters of their own law, to hold the rein too tightly over them. Thus, if the governor were at the time absent from Jerusalem, the tumult before us, and the bloody outrage to which it led, may easily have been overlooked. The Christians as a class had no power of making their voice heard with the Government; and the Jews may have felt that their hatred of the rising sect might be gratified with impunity. But what we are at present concerned to observe is, that though acting tumultuously and in a state of frenzy, the Jews are still punctilious as to the method of inflicting their punishment. "*They cast him out of the city.*" This was in pursuance of the law in Leviticus, that he who had blasphemed the name of the Lord, and cursed, should be *brought forth without the camp* and there stoned. When the Israelites had settled in the promised land, all walled towns were, according to the teaching of their doctors, to be considered as representing the camp, and the execution of malefactors was therefore to take place *outside the gate*. When arrived at a suitable spot the punishment proceeded in the regular way, the witnesses (i.e., the persons who had deposed to the blasphemies of Stephen against the Temple and the Ritual) first stripping themselves of their loose outer robes, and appearing in the tight-fitting tunic, which did not impede exertion, and then casting the first stone at the accused. This was in pursuance of the law in Deuteronomy regulating the punishment of the idolater, which was held binding, it would appear, also in the punishment of the blasphemer (Deut. xvii.) "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. . . . The hands of the witnesses shall be *first* upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you."

The outer garment, which was wrapt round the person for warmth at night, had some value. This also may be seen from the Levitical Law, in which we read—"If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down; for this is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious." Now, it was likely enough that in such an uproar as that which attended the death of St. Stephen, dishonest persons would be hanging about on the skirts of the mob, ready to seize any property which was dropped, or loosely guarded by its owners. It was therefore customary at executions to appoint some known person to take charge of the raiment of those who had to carry the sentence into effect. This charge was in the present case devolved upon the young man from the Cilician

synagogue who had shown such deep interest in the trial and who manifested so emphatically his concurrence with the proceedings against Stephen. He gladly accepted the trust; the clothes were thrown down *at his feet*, in sign of being given into his custody, just as the laying down money at the Apostles' feet was a sign of entrusting it to their disposal and administration; and, standing or sitting upon them, he witnessed the cruel scene, motionless in person, but his mind on the alert.

Other particulars respecting the punishment of stoning, which perhaps may have been observed in the case before us, are worthy of a brief notice. The criminal being bound was led to a place outside the gates twice the height of a man. Thence he was thrown down by a heavy blow upon the loins which one of the witnesses inflicted. Then the witnesses raised between them a single stone of such a size that the strength of two men was necessary to lift it, which was tumbled upon the chest of the criminal. If this failed to kill him, all the people threw stones upon him, until some vital part was bruised. The punishment was a cruel and uncertain one; and we gather from the Pentateuch that the Jews learned it, like so many other customs, in Egypt.

Withdrawing our eyes from the circumstantialia of the scene, we must now fasten them upon the holy martyr. And the point which we observe in him at this crisis is his studied imitation of the Master, in Whose cause he was encountering death. With admirable presence of mind, he is looking away unto Jesus as his model and so fixing the mental eye upon Him Whose glorified form he had just seen with the bodily eye, that he seems absorbed in the study, insensible to pain, and unconscious of the fury of his enemies. "Christ," says Augustine, "sat upon the chair of the Cross, and taught Stephen the rule of devotion."

We find the disciple distinctly imitating two of the sayings of his Master upon the Cross—framing his utterances as nearly as possible upon the same model. The first of these sayings was the latest which fell from our Lord's lips—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." The resemblance of this to, and its differences from, the martyr's utterance—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"—are full of interest. The *resemblance* is obvious on the surface. The wise man's description of death is as follows:—"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it." A resignation therefore of the spirit to God in the hour of death would seem to be the particular act of devotion suitable to that hour. The soul should be laid in the lap of the Father of spirits, from Whose bosom it came forth. We see this sentiment evidently in Christ. And we see a strong trace of it in St. Stephen. But there are three great *differences* of position between the Master and the disciple, which make the latter to alter in his own case the phraseology employed by the former.

(1) The first is, that our Blessed Lord was a perfectly righteous Man, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." And being perfectly righteous, He can speak, when dying, in accents of confidence which would not so well bespeak a sinner. What in His mouth therefore is a simple and solemn commendation, is turned in Stephen's into a humble prayer. Our Lord does what His disciple only petitions to be allowed to do. How undesignedly here does Stephen's consciousness of his own sinful nature come out! I do not know that there is any glimpse of it in the rest of the narrative, but this last cry opens to us in Stephen's heart that conscious unworthiness which characterises saints in proportion to their holiness. He is making the sacrifice of his life to Christ; yet how far is he from looking to this sacrifice for acceptance! He petitions the Saviour to receive his spirit, which is tantamount to saying, "Cast me not out."

And why should the Saviour cast him out? Why should Stephen think such a contingency possible? Because there was a deep sense of indeliberateness in his inner man. The glory which he had seen he had come short of; he had no claim but that of Christ's love to lay down his head upon the Lord's breast. So he will not lay it there without humbly soliciting permission. So far is he from pleading his martyrdom as a title to repose in death, that he asks as a favour this repose from his Saviour—"Lord Jesus" (or Lord Saviour), "receive my spirit."

(2) But again, in *Christ's commendation of His Spirit into the hands of His Heavenly Father*, there was a peculiar significance, understood, no doubt, by His early disciples, which made the terms strictly appropriate to no one but Himself. In His mouth they were tantamount to—"I resign My life; the sacrifice is not wrung from Me by human violence; it is not imposed upon Me by necessity, nor, indeed, by My Father's will, apart from My own concurrence; no man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." In short, the words express the voluntary surrender of life by the great High Priest as an expiation for the sins of men. Any follower of His, who had the least inkling of this significance in them, would shun the use of exactly the same expression, while maintaining the leading idea of a commendation of the soul into God's hands.

(3) But the most instructive point in St. Stephen's variation from his original is that he prays Christ, ~~not God, to receive his soul, thus recognising most emphatically the Mediatorship of our Blessed Lord.~~ "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." "He which is of God, He" (and He alone) "hath seen the Father." He may, and He does, transact with God directly without any intervening medium; He goes up boldly to the Throne of Grace with guiltless conscience, and, in full confidence of acceptance, says—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." But not so a sinner. Sinners must pass along the Way, must enter through the Door, to obtain access to a holy God. "I am the Way; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the Door of the sheep." Stephen therefore transacts with our Lord in his last moments, and not, except mediately, with God. And what a lesson of comfort for our own deathbeds does this first dying Christian teach us hereby! The mental and moral attitude of a dying Christian should be the same as the bodily attitude which St. John was privileged to assume at the table of the Last Supper. "Now there was *leaning on Jesus' bosom* one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." Christ lays His head, when dying, into the Father's lap; we should lay ours into His lap, encouraged to do so by the remembrance of His human sympathies, by the thought that He is a High Priest Who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; that He knows by experience the trial of pain, and the greater trial of mental depression in the last hour; and that withal His death is our true passage into life; the raft which can buoy us up on the waves of the dark River, and carry us securely into the haven of Eternal Life.

We now come to another particular in which the disciple, when encountering death, evidently set before him the Master as his model in his prayer for his murderers. "*He kneeled down.*" The account given of this kneeling in a work of some authority is—"Another crash of stones brought him on his knees." I can hardly accept this as the true meaning of the somewhat solemn words, "*he kneeled down*"—words never used elsewhere in the New Testament, except as descriptive of homage offered to God or Christ. I take them in connection with God's ordinance, as recorded by St. Paul, "that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and thing under

the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." I find Stephen, when one would think that his circumstances dispensed with all such outward signs, doing bodily homage to the name of Jesus, in acknowledgment that God had highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, and confessing with his tongue immediately afterwards that Jesus Christ is Lord. St. Stephen's was to be the pattern martyrdom for all ages of the Church ; and no point of testimony to Christ, whether it be the moral testimony of the way in which death is endured, or whether it be a mere posture of the body, is to be omitted. "*And cried with a loud voice.*" A contrast is here clearly pointed at between Stephen's death-cry and the slaughter-cry of the Jews which preceded it in the 57th verse. "Then they cried out with a loud voice." *They* cried out in fury, in abhorrence, in deadly hatred ; the wolves gnashed their teeth upon this innocent sheep of Christ's fold. And as grievous words stir up anger, and wrath usually begets wrath, we might expect that Stephen's loud cry would be one of holy defiance against them ; "Do your worst hell-hounds ; I shall soon be beyond your reach." In the former days of Jewish history, Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, a prophet-priest, moved (like Stephen) by the Spirit of God, had been (like Stephen) stoned with stones, at the commandment of king Joash, in the court of the house of the Lord. And with his expiring breath Zechariah had uttered a malediction on his murderers. "When he died he said, The Lord look upon it and require it." The curse had not been causeless ; and in due time it came. Our Lord foretold that upon the Jews of His generation, the very Jews who murdered St. Stephen, should "come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom they slew between the Temple and the Altar."

Now, shall Stephen's last cry be like the cry of Zacharias ? Shall he invoke requital upon those who are battering his body, and announce requital as imminent ? Stephen had not so learned Christ. Our Lord, "sitting on the chair of the Cross," had taught him a different lesson. For when the signal had been given to fasten His prostrate body to the accursed tree, and, beneath the first sharp impact of the nails, His Blood started forth for the remission of our sins, He intercedes for His murderers—"Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do." Abel's blood cried for vengeance ; but Christ's Blood, the Blood of sprinkling, speaketh better things than that of Abel. The disciple has marked this, and laid it to heart. He has heard, too, the Master's precept, repealing the traditionary maxims which had gathered round the Elder Code—"But I say unto you, Love your enemies ; bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you ; and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" ; and he has seen this precept illustrated by the Master's example. Now he will make himself a faithful copyist, echoing Christ in all things, except where his position makes a necessary difference in his sentiments. So he meets the infuriated clamour of his opponents with a clamour for mercy to be shown to them—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" ; and thus shows in the most emphatic way that vehement righteous indignation against sin is quite compatible with love to the person of the sinner, and that the lofty invective just hurled by him against that wicked council had in it no grain of personal animosity.

"And when he had said this, he fell asleep," or rather "he was laid asleep"—laid asleep by the loving Master to Whom he had so lately appealed. That Master received his spirit, closed his eyes upon his persecutors, their fury and their stones, and opened them on the beautiful Paradise, where the souls of

the faithful enjoy a halcyon calm after the storms of life have exhausted themselves; "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." Stephen was the first of those happy souls whose destiny is prophetically described by St. Paul in that great oracle—"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him," (literally, "those who are laid asleep through the instrumentality of—through the mediation of Jesus, will God bring with Him"). We have seen how St. Stephen in his last moments had recourse consciously to the mediation of our Lord. Now we are told how that recourse stood him in stead; how the Lord interposed in his behalf, and laid him asleep; how, in virtue of His sufferings Who died and rose again, Stephen enjoyed in death the deepest tranquillity of spirit. Jesus *died*—faced death in all its horrors, mental and physical. Stephen's departure, through the mediation of Jesus, was not to be called death; Our Lord had promised—"He that liveth, and believeth in Me, shall *never* die"; and St. Luke must be careful not to contradict his Master's words. So he says not that Stephen died, but that Stephen was laid asleep. The death of the believer is only a being laid asleep.

Moreover the Lord heard Stephen's dying prayer when Stephen was no more. As the answer to Christ's prayer for the forgiveness of His murderers was the centurion's acknowledgment—"Truly, this man was the Son of God"—so the answer to St. Stephen's prayer will be the conversion of that young man, who sits there on yonder heap of clothes watching the execution. You can see now, by the reflection in his features of the workings of his mind, that the answer is preparing.

Stephen the Proto-Martyr

BY REV. J. R. GRIFFITHS, LL.D.

"*They stoned Stephen,*" &c.—*Acts vii. 59.*

Martyrdom is an awful honour. Life is so precious, so impossible to recall, and the hereafter so tremendous to contemplate, that it is not surprising to find in history many examples of men willing to purchase an ignoble continuance of existence by sacrificing all and everything they possess. And even in the case of sanctified human nature it is hard to die—especially hard when one's years are few, and the current of life thrills in every vein and the world is tinged with the glow of our own ardent hopes and bright expectations. It is so easy for a young man called upon to die for the faith once delivered to the Saints to persuade himself that his heartfelt convictions are delusions which would vanish in maturer years—that he ought, as matter of common respect, to yield to the ripper wisdom of others, and to convince himself that the cause for which he is called upon to suffer would benefit more by his life rather than his death. These and many other plausible suggestions has the devil, no doubt, placed in the minds of young martyrs, in all the ages of faith, and whilst, therefore, we pay homage to all that glorious army of men of whom the world was not worthy, the testimony and example of young martyrs is specially interesting and valuable.

Men who have died rather than yield up their conscience beneath the pressure of brute force are powerful levers in overcoming the natural inertia of the world, even when their opinions are somewhat mistaken and not wholly at one. The death of Socrates has produced an effect upon the centuries which came after more potent and beneficial and healthful than all his teaching. The protest

of dying men against the oppression of the ignorant multitude has a value quite irrespective of the particular set of opinions in question at the time, and much of the freedom of speech at the present day in England is owing to the lesson, which has now been effectually learnt, that opinion cannot be stifled by the gag nor destroyed by the executioner—a lesson which has not been taught alone by the example of Christian martyrs. Science and philosophy can boast of men who endured the extremest anguish rather than renounce truths which they knew to be well established, and our heritage of political and social freedom is owing, in a large measure, to all of these illustrious worthies, and no doubt there are many now among those who profess to be unable to sympathise with the Spirit which animated Stephen and the rest of the chivalry of Heaven, who would nevertheless prefer to die rather than to stultify themselves by denying a well attested law of nature. Earnestness and thoroughness of conviction are virtues, which we cannot deny, even to those who differ most profoundly from us, and to the honour of our poor fallen human nature, be it said, these qualities have never been wanting when a great blow had to be struck for the liberty of thought.

But we owe much more than a mere testimony in the cause of freedom—inestimably precious though that be—to the martyrs of the Church. We owe, in the first place, the establishment of the fact that a conviction of the reality of the unseen may be as strong and mighty as a conviction produced by the examination of visible evidence. When men ask for a proof of the vivid grasp of the supernatural which we call faith—when cold and languid minds demand some token of the power of Christianity to change the current of men's lives, and to destroy all the ordinary and sordid motives of the unredeemed soul—we reply that men were ready to die rather than renounce their hopes in the unseen and, to the world, unknown future. In the second place the weak brethren in the faith may learn many an ennobling lesson of fortitude and endurance in running the race which is set before us by the contemplation of the glorious deaths of the martyrs. In the third place we owe much of the tolerance among different religious communities to our common inheritance of martyr examples. It was not enough to secure religious toleration that men of science should die for the truths they discovered or held. To endure divergence of creeds is the last lesson which is usually learnt in the march of freedom, and if, in days gone by, men who called themselves Christians were foremost in bigotry and intolerance it was because they knew nothing of the first and simplest lesson which every martyrdom proclaimed with deathless eloquence.

The story of Stephen is a touching one. He was probably a Greek who had manifested such extraordinary gifts that he was called to the diaconate when first it was established. In what manner he was led to embrace the faith we know not—we never shall know until we hear it from Stephen's own lips in the Jerusalem above. Christ visits the souls of men in different ways. If Stephen's conversion had been accomplished, as in St. Paul's case, by extraordinary means, we should most probably have known the circumstances, but the silence of the narrative suggests the inference that he had no other source of light than that open to all the dwellers in Jerusalem. Unwonted manifestations in God's dealings with the soul are not necessary in order to attain a high degree of sanctity and faith. We have only to use rightly the advantages in our reach, to walk in the plain pathway of duty which Stephen followed to arrive at the highest goal in the Christian life. When the young missionary commenced his labours his earnestness and zeal quickly provoked the wrath of the multitude who still clung to the dead and effete superstitions of the past. There were in Jerusalem

large numbers of strangers and representatives of so many varying nationalities that each party set up a synagogue of its own. To these synagogues students were attached, and with them Stephen debated. As they were unable to resist the force of his arguments they resorted to the stale old device which has in all ages been the favourite argument of corruption and ignorance—they caused him to be arrested on a charge of blasphemy. He was in due course brought before the Sanhedrin, and although he knew that the servant could not expect to escape when his Master had been convicted, he nevertheless pleaded for himself with considerable power. He contended that God had a Church in the world long before Moses and the Ceremonial Law, and that that Church would continue to exist when the Temple and all its splendid adjuncts had passed away for ever. And then, in burning words, he reproached them for their share in the cruel death of Him Who was the fulfilment of the law and the Promised One of the prophets—words which fell like molten lead upon the consciences of those who heard them. His best vindication, if any were needed—the surest proof that he uttered not one undeserved reproach—is found in the savage fury with which they fell upon him and stoned him. It was another nail in Israel's coffin—another step in the long course of national decadence—another proof of the strong delusion which was hurrying this fated people to its doom. They stoned him, and he died calling upon the name of God. There was one active missionary then less upon earth, one member the more in that glorious band of those who have come up from great tribulation; but as no good man ever dies without leaving behind memories and an example which are potent in moving the hearts of men, so Stephen's blood—from a human point of view—did not fall to the ground in vain. God needed servants and ambassadors of the Cross, and the most devoted missionary that ever lived was one who stood by consenting to the proto-martyr's death. And as the ages roll on men and women look back lovingly through the mists of time and think of the young hero who laid down his life in the service of Christ, when converts were few and enemies were many, with a tenderness which may well lead them to strive to walk as Stephen walked, and to die as he died, with the happy glow of the eternal home on every feature.

Let us learn one more lesson from this story. The riches, the pleasures, the raiment of the past are forgotten now, and that which was once regarded as unsubstantial and perhaps unreal—the principles which animated men in the days gone by—alone remains. No sculptured monument marks the spot where Stephen was laid to rest till the resurrection dawn, but his faith, his patient submission, his uncompromising zeal for the truth are his memorials which will last for all time. As the traveller stands on a hot summer day beneath the rays of the sun, he may see the pencils of light reflected from the rivulet and the flower, from the rock and from the forest, from the budding blossoms of the field and from the sea of golden grain upon the meadows. All of them catch the light and cast it back again upon the observer's eye. And thus beneath the flood of light which is ever pouring down upon a dark and guilty world from the great Sun of Righteousness, we can see some of the heavenly rays reflected back again from the couch of the aged Christian, and the counting-house of the pious merchant, from the lives of the saints and from the graves of martyrs. And through the long cycle of centuries that have lapsed these last speak to us in language which we surely cannot refuse to hear. They invite us onward in our course; they tell us of faith which will enable us to overcome the world, of endurance which will set the Devil's terrors at defiance, of a hope which no man can take from us, of a reward so blessed that eye hath not seen nor hath

ear heard of the things which the Father has prepared for them that love Him. Let us therefore not lag in our course, for the day is far spent and the night is at hand ; let us not relax a single effort in the race until we hear, as Stephen heard, those glorious words, sweeter than marriage bells or trumpet notes of victory, the mellow chime of all the celestial bells saying, " Come, ye blessed, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

The Martyrdom of St. Stephen

BY REV. THOMAS MAIN, D.D.

" They stoned Stephen," &c.—Acts vii. 59.

It is seldom that you meet in the sacred volume with any account of the death-beds of saints ; we are told how they lived, but no mention is made in the page of inspiration as to how they died ; the great thing for us is to give heed to the manner of the life, and God will see to it as to the manner of the death. But in the case of Stephen we are permitted to see how a Christian can die.

I. THE VISION HE OBTAINED. Now here we would fasten your attention on the position and posture of Jesus as standing at the Right Hand of God. This representation is altogether unexampled and peculiar. Where else throughout the whole of Scripture is Jesus ever represented as standing on the Right Hand of God ? When He had finished the work that was given Him to do He ascended up on high to receive His reward, and entered upon Heaven as a state of repose, sharing in the glory which He had with the Father. It is thus that the Apostle speaks of Him in the opening of his Epistle to the Hebrews : " When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the Right Hand of the Majesty on High," and again in the same Epistle you find the Apostle contrasting the posture of Jesus as sitting down at the Right Hand of God with the posture of the Jewish high priest standing daily ministering. This attitude of standing implied that their work of ministration was not yet completed, for they had still a sacrifice to offer and atonement to make ; whereas the posture of Jesus is one of expectation and repose, implying that His work was accomplished, and that nothing now remained for Him to do but to wait in the attitude of patient expectation till all His enemies be made His footstool. This is the uniform style of Scripture representation, that Jesus when He ascended *sat* down ; but here He has changed His posture, and instead of sitting He is imaged forth as having risen up and standing, the attitude of anxiety and excitement ; and surely it cannot be for naught that a change so important as this has taken place in the posture of Jesus ; it must have a meaning. It would seem as if the maddening shouts of the frenzied and infuriated multitude had arisen and entered into His ears ; and unable any longer to continue an indifferent and unconcerned spectator of the scene, He arose at once from His seat. Oh how solemn and impressive the spectacle ! as if the repose of the Saviour was broken, and the serenity of Heaven disturbed ; yes, standing there supreme amid the shining host as if actually coming to His help and arising in order to be the first to receive the dying martyr's spirit—standing as advocate to plead the cause of the martyr, and take his part against those who rose up against him, and who were dragging him away to a violent death—standing as a priest who standeth with the censor in his hand to offer up the spirit of the martyr and present it to God as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing—standing as the Judge of the contest with the crown of victory in

His hand, watching the candidate nearing the goal, ready to raise the shout of triumph and Himself to place the diadem upon his head—standing as the Elder Brother, the first-born among many brethren, to show him the path, His arms outstretched to receive him with the gracious welcome, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” to take this earliest flower of martyrdom and place it at His own right hand to bloom and shine for ever in the Paradise of God. What a solemn and impressive spectacle is this! how full of rich and precious consolation, for it tells us that empires may rise and fall, monarchs be discrowned and dethroned, and the sceptre of authority be shivered in their hands, yet the cry of nations in perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, will not prevail to raise Jesus from His Throne; but let one solitary saint be called to suffer or to die, and straightway He rises to receive him. In all their afflictions He is afflicted.

But there is a second point contained in this sublime vision to which we would now invite your attention, namely, that it is on the humanity of Jesus that the eye of the martyr fastens, and from which his consolation springs—on Christ in His mediatorial character; for though the sacred historian informs us that Stephen saw the glory of God, yet the martyr himself makes no mention whatever of that glory; his eye was not dazzled by the magnificence of the scene that burst upon his view; his attention was not disturbed or distracted by its radiance. The Saviour occupied such a place in his heart that the sight of Jesus absorbs his attention, and blinds his eye to all the glories of the upper world, so that, though he saw Heaven opened, he can tell nothing but this: “I see the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God.” This we cannot help regarding as a striking and sure characteristic of the genuine believer, to have his soul directed to the spiritual rather than the material glory of Heaven. There are many who read Bunyan’s *Pilgrim* with the highest admiration and delight, who have no relish whatever for the Scripture truth it contains; and just what is true of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim* is true also to a large extent of a class who have no relish for any other Heaven than a Paradise of material delights—who would long to be admitted there for no other end than to have their eye feasted with the loveliness of the celestial landscape, and their ear regaled with the melody of harpers harping on their harps. Admit the mere sentimental and imaginary Christian to see Heaven opened, and he will be able to tell you of the crystal stream, and the sea of glass, and the shady bowers; but a genuine believer will sum up his description of Heaven with the brief but emphatic statement: “I see Jesus.” Such is the felicity of Heaven on which his eye fastens, and from which he draws his strong consolation; not the sight of Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, wielding the sceptre of unlimited dominion, so much as of Jesus the Lamb in the midst of the Throne, comes home to his heart with a thrilling and refreshing influence and power, for it links him by a closer bond of fellowship to the Throne of the Eternal. When we regard Jesus not as the Lord of Glory merely, but as the Son of Man standing at the Right Hand of God, we feel how true it is that we have an High Priest Who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, Who had Himself partaken of the sufferings and sorrows of humanity, and crowned His life with a cruel death, Who would feel all the more the force of the appeal in that He Himself had suffered, being tempted.

II. THE SPIRIT AND CONDUCT OF THE MARTYR.

1. He displayed unshaken confidence, for he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, not like the stricken and trembling publican, who would not lift up so much as his eyes to Heaven. His anchor is cast within the veil; he knows where

to look in the hour of trial ; indeed he has nowhere else to look for comfort and support. What a striking contrast does the serenity of Stephen present to the burning rage and fiery agitation of the multitude around him ! Turning away his eyes from all terrestrial things, as one who has done for ever with the world, he fixes them with a firm and steadfast gaze on Heaven—where his treasure is, and his heart also. And whence this calm and unruffled serenity ? It is because he can say, “ I know in Whom I have believed.” Beloved brethren, there is but one foundation on which the hope and confidence of a sinner can rest, whether it be the act of a sinner coming for the first time to lay hold of the Saviour, or a believer coming to the Throne of Grace upon earth, or the Throne of Judgment hereafter—even that foundation laid in Zion—the sacrifice of Christ, by which atonement is made for sin, and we are reconciled to God. But if over and above this I wished to inspire anyone with confidence, then in addition to making known to him the whole mediatorial work of the Saviour, I would set before him the humanity of Jesus as bone of our bone. What strong consolation has not the bereaved mourner derived from that one verse, “ Jesus wept ” ? The human tears and tenderness of Jesus have been the means of wiping the tears from many a weeping eye, and if you stretch your view beyond the visible horizon, and look forward to the day when the great Throne will be set, you will find that it is still the view of the humanity of Jesus that is holden up to inspire us with confidence. The Judge will be recognised as the Elder Brother Who is not ashamed to call us brethren. Just so in the case before us. It was this aspect of Jesus as the Son of Man that won the heart of Stephen and inspired him with a martyr's courage, and assured him of the Saviour's sympathy. It assured him that he would not be overlooked amid the glory of the sky, or forgotten amid the shining hosts around. With such a vision as this before him, marvel not at the brightness of the martyr's eye : he is gazing on his kinsman Redeemer, Who has risen up from His place ready to supply him with a martyr's strength, and confer on him a martyr's crown. Jesus was the desire of his soul, the chief among ten thousand. This is the secret of dying. When the departing spirit appropriates the personal fraternal affection of Jesus to His people amid the struggles of dissolving nature, it will prove like an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast.

2. His dying invocation. What a fine illustration does the martyr furnish of the Scripture expression, “ lifting up holy hands without wrath ” ! He prays for his murderers, “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” But the point on which I wish to fasten your attention is the striking proof here furnished of the Divinity of Jesus. Stephen calls upon God, saying, “ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ”—obviously implying his belief that Jesus was indeed God. What a striking contrast in the death of Herod ! he was stricken by God and eaten up of worms, because he did not ascribe his splendid gifts to their proper source ; while Stephen soars aloft to Heaven in the express act of giving glory to another. And why this marvellous difference but just because in the one case the glory was offered to a man, in the other to Jehovah ? Stephen paid the selfsame act of adoration to Jesus, in delivering up to Him the care of his departing soul, as Jesus Himself did to the Father when He said, “ Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit ” ; and, indeed, what more solemn and impressive testimony can any soul bear to the confidence it reposes in God ? For what treasure does a man possess so inestimably precious as his soul ? and what hour of his being is fraught with such importance as the hour of quitting the earthly tabernacle, and launching on the shoreless ocean of eternity ? The last act of a believer is just like his first ; he began his Christian life with the surrender

of his soul, yielding himself unto God, and now he closes his career with the like surrender. If this be dying, then is the Christian dying daily ; for he is daily committing afresh the keeping of his soul to God ; and those who die daily upon earth will live eternally in Heaven. I like this continuity. What wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan ? Do nothing new, nothing strange or unusual, nothing but what thou hast done a thousand times before ; and the more you lean on God and surrender yourself to Him, the more you cultivate that very grace, and acquire that selfsame spirit, the more you will find the power of true religion to sustain in every hour of tribulation, and in the hour of death.

So Stephen fell asleep amid a shower of stones : no struggle ! asleep amid the storm, amid the roar of battle ! for there was no storm within. When they dragged him forth from the earthly Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem opened her gates to receive him. Had he quailed before the rising storm, and trembled in presence of his judges, it would have sent dismay throughout the ranks of the faithful in all generations, as when a standard-bearer falleth. Had he left without tokens of his Master's presence and countenance, friendless and alone, it would have damped and dismayed the generations of the saints ; but grace was given him to speak for Christ and to die for Christ, displaying alike in his words and his death how truly Christ spoke : " My grace is sufficient for thee ; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The Death of Stephen

BY REV. ALEXANDER CAMPBELL.

"They stoned Stephen," &c.—Acts vii. 59.

I THE MOST COGENT ARGUMENTS, WHEN ADDRESSED TO THE PRECONCEIVED OPINIONS OF MEN, INSTEAD OF PRODUCING THE CONVICTION WHICH THEY OUGHT, FREQUENTLY EXCITE TO THE MOST UNJUST ACTIONS AND THE MOST VIOLENT EXTREMES THOSE TO WHOM THEY ARE ADDRESSED.

This is a consequence either of some gross superstition taking hold of the mind, or of pride, which would lead us to consider our own powers of understanding as at least equal to those of any other, or of the corruption of the heart, which is afraid of its own criminal thoughts being brought to a full exposure. But if the right course were to be pursued, every opportunity of farther information would willingly be embraced, that superstition, which is the cause of much deformity and the proof of great weakness in human nature, might be avoided ; that the corrupted sentiments of the heart might be no excuse for the besetting sins which we are too apt to indulge ; and that pride, which is very unsuitable to the present situation of man, dependent and fallible as he is, should be extirpated. Yet nothing is more difficult than to find a suitable access to the mind for any of these purposes, because immediately an alarm is apt to be taken that a superiority is assumed which ought not to be acknowledged. If a superiority should possibly exist in one way, from greater facilities of acquiring any particular information, there may be just as great a degree of inferiority in another way, so that the balance may still remain exactly equal. And without a free communication of knowledge in this manner, no great improvement can be expected. Many of our opinions are taken up on questionable, and some of them on erroneous, grounds ; and if we lend a deaf ear to everything that would oppose them, we perpetuate error, and stop our progress at once in the attainment of knowledge. It becomes us then to listen with readiness, and to weigh

with much deliberation, the reasons which should induce us to change; and so far is this from being disparaging to our nature that it is a noble evidence of our capacity for endless improvement, and an admission only that we are wiser now than when we received our first impressions. But instead of all this we too frequently find those who engage in reasoning with each other more deeply rooted in their mutual preconceived opinions; those who had begun with coolness break off with animosity and angry feelings, and were it not for the restrictions laid upon them by the laws of human society, willing to allow this animosity and these feelings, like a small spark from which a great conflagration arises, to proceed to a deadly revenge.

This is illustrated in the case of Stephen, where the power was all on the side of his enemies, and where an awful use was made of that power. He laid his argument, so far as he was allowed to proceed, on a firm footing, which nothing could overthrow; and when he saw a movement to oppose him, he was not deterred from exposing the iniquitous source from which that movement proceeded. Fearless of the injuries which might be done to himself, he traced the origin of the storm which was beginning to agitate the bosom of his enemies to their own sinful, obstinate, and corrupted minds; and charged them with filling up the iniquity of their fathers, who were the persecutors of their prophets that showed before of the coming of Christ, by being themselves the betrayers and murderers of that just and holy One. At this merited rebuke all former restraints were broken away at once, their stifled indignation burst forth with the greatest intensity, and the established rules of procedure were trampled upon, as too tedious to be observed; for the passion for revenge blinded the eye of reason, seared the conscience as with a hot iron, and left no prevalent feeling but an unsatiable thirst for his innocent blood. The only symptom of a thinking principle remaining within them at all was a very ignominious one—the wish of preserving some appearance of regard for the forms of their religion, while its spirit was so shamefully violated. It had been a command in their law that blasphemers should be thrust out of the camp before they were put to death; and now with their hearts cut as it were with a saw, and gnashing upon him with their teeth, they cast him out of the city, and began that work which redounded to their dishonour, but to his glory—taking care at the same time that the false witnesses whom they had suborned against him should be the first agents in this work of iniquity. He had thus the high honour of being admitted into the light of the countenance of God, and into the society of the Angels and the spirits of the just made perfect, as the first martyr who suffered death for the Master Whom he loved. The pale of the Christian Church was broken upon for the first time, in his case, by the hands of relentless murderers; and though the blow had been struck from without, and the deed had been committed by those who had not attained to the Christian name, it was committed by persons to whom the knowledge of Christianity was offered, and who might have enjoyed its comforts, had not their own malignant minds rendered them unworthy of such a privilege. The torch of persecution was lighted by them in the vain hope of putting down the Branch which arose, not merely from the stem of David, but from the everlasting Father; but it was lighted to show, in a more conspicuous point of view, the ignominy of the human race.

II. IN THE MIDST OF THEIR TRIALS CHRISTIANS ENJOY A CONSOLATION WHICH BEARS THEM UP, AND RENDERS THEM VICTORIOUS.

They have sufficient authority for believing, and sufficient strength for the confirmation of this belief, that the hand of God will not be withdrawn from them, nor leave them alone. He Who in the days of Elijah, amid the general

prevalence of idolatry, reserved for Himself in the land of Israel seven thousand persons who did not bow the knee to Baal, reserves about them many thousands who do not go forth into the intercourse of human life with the sting of the adder or the poison of the serpent, but with the gentleness of the lamb and the harmlessness of the dove. They rejoice in finding so much unity of sentiment in the service of God, so many members partaking of the privileges belonging to His family, and so many hearts beating with a desire of improving the condition and forwarding the best interests of the human race. They are anxiously engaged in this work, and are ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh of them a reason for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear. But if the reasons for this hope be either wilfully misrepresented or perverted, they are not wanting to the exigencies of the occasion, but rise up to a degree of energy and power which all their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist.

It was in this manner that Stephen was employed when his well-intended labours met with the fate which we have described. He had the sure testimony within himself that his cause was good, and he was not left in any degree of doubt whether his labours should finally be approved. The words of Jesus were to him the words of life, and the spirit of the promise was strengthening within, that He would never leave nor forsake him. As a proof that He was particularly present with him at that time, and acknowledged him as a fellow-worker in His own good cause, a special vision of the glory of God, and of the honour to which the Son of God was exalted, was given him. The Heavens, which serve as a veil to conceal from every human eye the world of spirits, and to leave a connection with that world to exist only in thought—just as the veil of the temple, at the death of our Saviour, was rent to disclose to view the typical holy of holies—were opened to disclose to the view of this righteous servant, in the true holy of holies, the High Priest of his profession, standing on the Right Hand of God. He had probably seen Him not long before in the act of offering up His effectual sacrifice; he had been a witness of the ignominy of the Cross on which He was suspended as a common malefactor, and in company with those who were really of that character; and his heart must have been pierced with anguish by the derision and insults and cruelty which the whole host of His enemies studied to devise. Even then he does not appear to have let his faith in Him go—and what a confirmation did it now receive! What a contrast was there between the state of his Saviour then, suffering and dying, and His state now, glorified with God, engaged in the same works of beneficence, and sharing the same honours with Him; and yet, all-glorious as He was, as Lord of Angels and of men, standing up, as it were, ready to receive His dying faithful friend! Does not this remembrance of those whom He left behind Him to struggle with the difficulties of this world—does not the fact of there being such a connection between Him and the spirit of those who belong to Him—infuse into your heart a holy desire of being united to Him, and a belief that they who are in union with Him having nothing to fear? Though with their bodily eyes they cannot see Him, with the eye of faith they behold Him having a feeling for their infirmities, supporting them in every trial, and preparing to receive them at last into the joys of their Father.

III. THIS TESTIMONY OF STEPHEN BRINGS JESUS INTO OUR VIEW, AS THE ORIGIN OF ALL THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH, THROUGH VARIOUS CHANNELS, ARE CONVEYED TO US, AND AS THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE SHALL STAND SURE AND IMMOVABLE.

Reason tells us that having violated the law of God, and forfeited the favours promised to the fulfilment of that law, we have no means of compensation in our own power to atone for our past guilt, and to restore to us future privileges. It tells us, also, that no aid can be imparted by any mere created being, however exalted the rank or however perfect the doings of such beings may be ; because all their performances are merely an exercise of the powers which God has bestowed upon them, and to every possible exertion of these powers He has a sovereign undoubted claim. All hope from any part or description of the creation of God, either in Heaven or on earth, is thus excluded ; and whoever builds upon any of these, builds on a foundation of sand, and exposes himself to a grievous and sudden fall.

But He Who took pity upon us, and holds out to us the prospect of deliverance—Who engaged in the arduous work of seeking and of saving those who were lost, and of providing a righteousness which should be well-pleasing in the sight of God, and capable of magnifying His holy law—brought down with Him from the Kingdom of Heaven the characteristics of every perfection required for His work, and laid claim to being the equal of the uncreated God. He was evidently supported by the power, and led by the counsels, of God—for He performed such works as no man could do except God were with him ; and were He to deviate in any degree from these counsels, or to advance a single step beyond the firm foundation and high standard of truth, then should He be found fighting against God, or, in His own words, His Kingdom would be divided against itself, and could not stand. But it has stood, and shall stand for ever, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. It is the Kingdom which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. God is jealous of His honour being transferred to any other object, and punishes such iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, and threatens to give up all those who are under such a delusion to the snares of the enemy who lies in wait for them ; but in proportion as the honour of Christ increased, and the steadfastness of His followers was manifested towards Him, and His work of mercy was drawing to a close, the testimony was reiterated, that the good pleasure of the Lord rested upon Him and prospered in His hand. All the honour conferred upon Him redounded to God, and the successful determination of His work manifested their glory in an equal degree, for He and the Father are one.

The Apostles who were under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit were full of this belief, and their actions were regulated in conformity with their impressions. They ascribed unto Him all the names which belong only to the Godhead ; they acknowledged and rejoiced that He was possessed of all the divine perfections ; and they offered Him the sincere adoration of the heart, giving glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, and praying for blessings from them. Yet none could be more careful than they were in withholding, on their own part, this worship from any who might be called but was not really God, and in warning others from falling into this easy and general deception. Two of them, after working a notable miracle on a man who had been a cripple from his birth, might themselves have become an object of adoration to the surrounding spectators ; but instead of giving any countenance to such an impiety, they rent their clothes, ran in among the people, and declared that they were men of like passions with themselves.

All the righteous spirits who have a proper view of the glory of God are actuated in a similar manner. An angel who disclosed to St. John part of the revelation which bears his name was mistaken by him for the high Angel of the covenant,

and about to be worshipped ; but the act was averted by the prohibition, " See thou do it not ; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book ; worship God." For cherishing a spirit of an opposite kind, they who were once angels of light were thrust out of the Heaven to become spirits of darkness. Yet no holy spirit sees any impiety in worshipping Christ as the equal of God. Among these Stephen, as yet in the body, and encompassed with its infirmities, received the most honourable testimony which could be bestowed ; for in the course of a very short narrative he is repeatedly declared to have been a man full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. The directions which the Holy Ghost gave him in reference to Jesus appear from the whole tenor of his conduct to have been, to consider no obstacles too difficult to surmount even at the risk of life, and to view life itself as incapable of being enjoyed when it could not be devoted to His glory, and to the furtherance of the work which He entrusted to His followers. When the end of his life was come—when all temporal scenes were closing up behind him, and nothing remained but to pass over the boundary of this world—in that hour, without dissimulation or disguise, he left upon record the most sincere instance of adoration and homage, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Does not this, among other innumerable instances, prove incontestably that He on Whom the Christian depends is Immanuel, God with us ; and that He is worthy to receive, and entitled to claim, the praises of His own redeemed ?

IV. THE EXAMPLE OF STEPHEN IS WORTHY OF OUR IMITATION, IN COMMITTING THE WELFARE OF OUR SPIRITS INTO THE HANDS OF OUR GLORIFIED AND DIVINE REDEEMER.

We are sufficiently anxious to take every precaution for the welfare of the body ; while attention to the interests of the soul, the better part of man, is either too often deferred, or considered as a matter of secondary importance. It is one of the great beauties of the Christian religion, that while it assigns the chief place and directs the greatest care to that to which it is due, it does not neglect the other, but carries on the interests of both hand in hand. It does not address us as pure, but as embodied spirits, who must bestow considerable thought on upholding the tabernacle in which the soul has its lodging for the time. It even turns our desire for temporal things to our advantage by suggesting the thought, that as these are the gifts of God, how much more valuable gifts must He have in reserve for our better part ? Thus a moderate, but not an inordinate, desire for the good things of the world is not only allowed, but commanded ; for the same Gospel which says, " Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed," says also that " he who provideth not for his own, specially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." This denial of the faith, and this worse than infidelity, may sometimes occur ; but it arises from bad habits of body, and not from any undue interruption from being too spiritual and holy. The spiritually-minded man does not undervalue the innocent enjoyments of life, nor disregard the opinion of men when it is on the side of goodness ; but neither the opinion nor power nor persecutions of men can swerve him from his duty ; for he then learns not to fear them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but to fear Him Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

This is the true spirit of Christianity. This spirit was clearly exhibited in the noble example of the first martyr to the Christian faith. He did not rush unnecessarily on death, neither must we rush upon temporal evils ; but when death or apostasy became unavoidable, he determined to please God rather than men ; and when temporal evils come to our lot, we must bear them with fortitude and resignation.

St. Stephen

BY REV. JOHN EDMUNDS, M.A.

"They stoned Stephen, calling upon God," &c.—Acts vii. 59, 60.

Such was the death of the first martyr, of the man who was the first to lay down his life in the cause of Christ. These were his dying words; this was his last testimony to the doctrine for which he suffered. He had preached many a sermon, and all his preaching was "with demonstrations of the Spirit and with power," and many souls might bless God for his ministry as the means of their conversion; but did he ever speak words which breathed more of heavenly wisdom, and of God's Holy Spirit, than these two short sentences with which he closed his ministerial work? Did he ever preach a sermon more eloquent in its delivery, more powerful in its effects, better suited to sink into the hearts of those that heard him, more likely to win converts to the Gospel of Christ? Surely we may say, that as Samson in his death slew more than all he had slain in his life, so St. Stephen in his death converted and saved more than all he had saved in his life.

The last words of dying people make an impression upon us: we cannot help feeling interested in them. In the case of those who are dear to us, if we were not present to witness their departure, we ask many questions about it, what was said and what was done upon the occasion. In biography there is always a peculiar interest in the closing scene. Francis Bacon, in an Essay upon Death, has brought together the last words of several men of note that flourished in the heathen world. It is not much to say that the dying words and last actions of our Christian worthies will bear comparison with them. I have read of a good man lying on his death-bed, who asked those that stood by to bring him the Bible, and to open it at the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. And as the mists of death had now dimmed his eyes, so that he could not see, he bade them put his finger upon the two concluding verses of the chapter, and so he departed. The words to which the finger pointed were these: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life," &c.

But let us now consider the last words of the dying martyr, as preserved for us in holy writ. They consist of two short petitions; one for the salvation of his own soul, the other for the pardon of his enemies. His first prayer is, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He had learned it from the Lord Himself, and in repeating it he did but follow the example which the Lord had set him. For we read that when Jesus had hung for hours upon the Cross, when He had brought His sufferings to a close, having offered the atoning sacrifice, and having paid the full penalty of the sins of man, then He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit! and having said this He gave up the Ghost." And the form of prayer which our Saviour, in the days of His flesh, offered up to God the Father, is adopted by St. Stephen in his petition to our Saviour Himself: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He believed that Jesus Christ was the Lord of life and glory, and that all power had been delivered unto Him both in Heaven and earth. He had just been privileged to see "the Heavens opened," and his Almighty Deliverer in all His power and glory. How then could he do otherwise than acknowledge Him as his God? How could he be afraid of intrusting himself to His care? He knew Whom he believed, and in full assurance of faith he offered his petition, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

Brethren, do you ever follow the example of the martyr in "calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"? Do you ever pray directly to the Second

Person of the Blessed Trinity? I hope you do: for a worthier pattern you could not have than the prayer of a martyr, a man full of the Holy Ghost, and that man at the point of death, a death brought upon himself by his own firm profession of the faith. And this dying martyr has taught us, by word and by deed, to bend the knee in prayer to Jesus Christ.

There is another striking point in the martyr's prayer. As we remark that the Divine Person to Whom he addresses it is the Lord Jesus, so we remark that the mercy for which he prays is the safety, the well-being of his soul. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" As for his body he seems to have lost all thought, all regard for it. Amid all the pangs and agonies of death, amid the violence and the cruelty which were bearing him down, we do not hear one word of complaint, not one word, that the Lord would be pleased to assuage his pains and to put an end to his sufferings. No, none of these things moved him: they were "light afflictions, and were but for a moment." But his soul, his immortal soul, that, with him, was the one all-absorbing consideration! That the soul might be saved, that it might enter into peace, that it might rest in blessedness, in the Paradise of God. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

But let us pass on to the martyr's second petition. "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge!" This prayer, also, he had learned of his Saviour. For we read that "when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." How deeply must the saint have been imbued with the spirit of his beloved Lord, when, in mortal agony, he could yet gather strength to kneel upon his knees, and could (as it were) collect his dying breath to cry aloud for all to hear, that he pardoned those who did the wrong, and called on God to pardon them. "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge!" He does not call their evil deed by any lighter name than *sin*. He does not flatter them, as though they were engaged in a righteous execution. He had told them before, that they were "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears": and he tells them now, that this cruel bloody work of theirs was wickedness. It was a foul and barbarous murder. But he bore them no malice for it. He freely, from his heart, forgave them; and he prayed the Lord to forgive them: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!"

The Jewish martyr had not advanced so far in love and charity: he did not, like St. Stephen, testify forbearance towards his enemies, or with his dying breath convey forgiveness to them. He, too, was stoned to death, and stoned for rebuking sin, for exhorting king and people to return to the Lord their God. "The Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, He hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord.

And when he died he said, The Lord look upon it and require it!" He felt—he could not help feeling—that it was an unjust, ungenerous outrage, that the blows were aimed by those at whose hands he had deserved the best; and with this thought in his heart, his last words were, "The Lord look upon it and require it!" But then he had never learned the Christian doctrine of forgiveness. He did not fully comprehend either the love of God or the doctrine grounded on it: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." He could not say, "The love of Christ constraineth us." He had never heard the words of the Lord Jesus, "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them

that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you ! ” But St. Stephen had often heard these words, and had often repeated them in his doctrine. He had also the example of his Master's death to study and to copy ; and by the grace of God he did not study it in vain. He followed it. And thus the religion of the Christian was grander and purer than that of the Jew. The love of the Christian triumphed over the natural man, and “ made him more than conqueror through Him that loved him.”

The martyr died forgiving his murderers, and with his last breath praying for them : “ Lord ! lay not this sin to their charge ! ” It may be, the prayer was not without effect, in many cases. It may be that some of those who were the most forward in putting him to death were afterwards humbled in repentance, and brought into “ the obedience of faith.” They were softened and melted by what they saw and what they heard. The Holy Ghost made it the means of their conversion, showed them the error of their way, and set them to seek the Lord in the accepted time, and to obtain pardon and peace. St. Stephen had prayed that they might find mercy, and “ the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

In one case we are sure that prayer *did* avail. There was one of those standing by, and he by no means the least forward to “ consent to the counsel and deed of them ” ; and yet for him we know that the martyr's prayer was not offered in vain. We are told that “ the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. . . . And Saul was consenting unto his death.” Nevertheless the Lord did not lay this sin to Saul's charge. He found mercy. He learned to “ know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” God called him by His grace ; and Paul the Apostle preached the faith which Saul of Tarsus persecuted. Paul the Apostle was himself persecuted for this faith's sake ; he was stoned while he was labouring to propagate the faith, and at length he laid down his life a martyr to the faith. Oh, the efficacy of all-prevailing prayer ! Oh, the depth of the riches of the mercy of God ! “ How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out ! ”

But though Saul was pardoned this great sin, yet he was not spared the bitterness of repentance. How many a tear of deep remorse did he shed ! how many a cutting reproach did he bring against himself, whenever in after years he thought upon this period of his life ! The shame and the smart of his sin seemed almost to cleave to him to the last. “ When the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.” “ I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.” “ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Blessed was he in his repentance ! his iniquity was forgiven and his sin covered.

But the trials and the troubles of St. Stephen are now over. He had borne testimony to the truth ; he had commended his soul to the Saviour's keeping ; he had prayed for his enemies—and after that “ he fell asleep.” What a soothing image !—“ He fell asleep.” It is the weary labourer, who returns home in the evening spent with toil, and lays him down and takes his rest. And this is death, when the Saviour has destroyed its sting. Thus we read that “ David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.” He died in the purple chamber of the royal palace on the king's bed, with friends and attendants standing round to smooth his dying pillow, to watch his every movement, to supply his every want—and when he died he “ fell asleep.” St. Stephen died a death of violence and anguish, a horrible death ; one flinches

at the very thought of it ! His body all crushed and mangled, his bones broken, his whole person changed into a bleeding, misshapen, unsightly mass of flesh : but when he died, he also " fell asleep." He slept in Jesus, to awake to a joyful resurrection.

Modern Martyrdoms

BY REV. C. M. DAVIES, D.D.

" They stoned Stephen, calling upon God," &c.—Acts vii. 59, 60.

" Live—that you may die " involves an axiom in religion. It is a self-evident truth that if you school a man to live, you school him for life's crown and consummation—death. The old moralists saw this. They said before you could predicate happiness of any person, you must see his death. They might have gone a step further and said that from the fixed point of death, supposing that was all you could see, you would be able to infer the general character of past life, whatever might have been its fluctuations. Death in fact is all we do see in the history of St. Stephen. He is to us emphatically the protomartyr. His very name would seem to have been given him with that end in view—the Crown of Martyrs : first wearer of his Lord's own badge of Nobility, the Circlet of Thorns !

I claim Stephen the Protomartyr even more than John the Beloved, as the type of the Christian young man. The high spiritual character of St. John seems, perhaps, even more unattainable than it really is ; but in practical business capacity, in sharp logical power of discussion, a gift always prized by youth, as well as in stern Spartan rectitude, Stephen is the model every young man, up to a certain point, would like to make his own. In such goodness as his there is no symptom of weakness, no atom of asceticism or eccentricity.

If you glance down Acts vi. vii., you will find these remarks fully borne out. He was chosen for the diaconate on account of his faith and fulness of the Holy Spirit. He stood out as the champion of the new doctrines against certain synagogues which were in high repute, and one of which numbered amongst its adherents Saul of Tarsus. The special point he had to establish in the teaching of the Nazarenes—for I fancy that the Christian faith was in the eyes of many so far only the Nazarene synagogue—was that the new faith was no mere local religion. The accusation brought against him by the Sanhedrin was that he proposed, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to destroy the holy *place* and to change those customs to whose dead letter the Jews clung the more convulsively in proportion as they had lost their living spirit. It is a strange paradox in man's nature that he will often fight harder for a form when that form has ceased to have any weight save what it borrows from antiquity. Against this specious conservatism of the Scribes and Pharisees Stephen levelled the tremendous dialectics of this Acts vii. It sounds like a reverberation of one of the Master's speeches against those same blind leaders. We scarcely marvel to read that his face shone like an Angel's with enthusiasm, when thus he stood on his defence for the dear Saviour he had loved and so recently lost. Here again you see the lessons of the Incarnate Life and Death, of Galilee and Calvary, had taken root in this young man's heart ; and directly the emergency came there was a superhuman strength to meet it. Man made Stephen the deacon, God made him the martyr. Taking martyr only in its literal sense of witness, and not for the moment in the more terrible technical sense it afterwards

acquired, God fulfilled at once the words of Jesus Christ in this eloquent defence of Stephen before the Sanhedrin. He gave him a mouth and wisdom which all his adversaries could not gainsay or resist. He was but a young man, and they grey-bearded elders, rulers in Israel, Hebrews of Hebrews, the very representative men of the old dying faith. Yet just as the boy Christ disputed with them in the Temple, so did the youth Stephen beard them in the very lion's den itself. It was but too easy to forecast the consequences. The disciple is not above his Master. If they had killed the Son, they would not spare the servant. It took persecutors three centuries to learn that rudimentary truth, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Churches. Three centuries! Nay, three hundred years have scarcely rolled away since here in England each of the two great parties into which Christianity was broken up, made precisely the same mistake that the Sanhedrin made with Christ and with Stephen, thinking they could crucify or stone or burn out the truth.

Yes, it was easy to forecast the consequences, but that was no time to premeditate or to mince words. He had counted the cost beforehand. Christ's life and Christ's words and acts taught him how to comport himself in presence of the powers that be; but Christ's death taught him to do more, and gave him strength to do far more than this.

It would scarcely seem that this martyrdom of Stephen was a planned premeditated act, as the death of Jesus had been. The act lacks all the dignity even of that mock trial. They did not call in the terrible crime of treason against Rome to compass his destruction. He suffered for blasphemy. No doubt his new doctrines seemed such to the Jewish authorities. In the fermentation of the new wine, the old wineskins burst, and the first victim of the disruption was this angel-faced young deacon. The first result was to send that martyr-spirit to its Lord in Paradise.

And so he "fell asleep." Beautiful expression, canonised by the old traditional use in Israel. "He slept with his fathers," but never so true as of this first Christian martyr. Never in the old bypast days of childhood had his Hebrew mother so lulled him to repose; never after long days of wandering had he so gladly sought his needful rest at night as now; "after life's fitful fever" he slept, and, closing his bodily eyes on the murderous scene here below, opened his spirit-vision upon the glories of Paradise, and the familiar lineaments of his Saviour's marred image!

That death was only life's climax and consummation. As the life has been so will the death be; and be quite sure that the work of life cannot be done in one retributive act on the death-bed. You will quote the Penitent Thief and say it can. But will you venture to compare your opportunities for good with this poor man's lack of such? God can equalise all deficiencies, we know, but speaking broadly and generally—as one must speak here—it is quite safe to say that men cannot compress into one energetic act of forgiveness and sympathy on the death-bed that which ought to have overspread and given a tone to life.

There are modern martyrdoms even in these far-down days, though stoning, crucifying, and burning at the stake have gone out of fashion, or been found ineffectual to accomplish the ends they propose. Let a man in the name of Jesus of Nazareth hold an unpopular doctrine or follow an untrodden path in practice, and society will rain its missiles down upon him, and crucify him like a malefactor as far as it can. Society and authority fancy they are doing God service. So did the Sanhedrin; so did Saul of Tarsus. I have no word to say against them. It is the stoned and the crucified we must exhort to try the temper

of their Christianity by seeing whether they can in the time of trial pray for those who persecute them.

To be able so to do—to be able to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven, the brother who is clearly in the wrong, not only in the bright clear-seeing of death, but amid the mists in the Valley of the Shadow, this will bring a man peace at the last. Nothing will bring him so much peace among the inevitable pains of death as the feeling that through life he has tried to forgive as then he hopes to be forgiven.

And yet more than this again. Besides bringing peace to the martyred, that old truth stands good, "*Sanguis martyrum semen ecclesiae.*" The fruit of Stephen's martyrdom was Saul of Tarsus. That falling to sleep won to Christ's Church the bravest worker she ever embraced, who afterwards, as "Paul the Aged," left his dying testimony, too, in the Second Epistle to Timothy. And still though the ages have passed away, this young angel-faced Stephen "being dead, yet speaketh": speaks to us here in God's House in words persuasive to Christian energy, be life short or long: speaks words which (God grant it) may nerve us to forgiveness of injuries in any of the petty martyrdoms we may be called upon to endure: and so speak comfort and consolation when we come to die perhaps as painfully as he did: speak even yet more eloquently to those who stand around and see us go, or moralise above our graves when we are gone.

The First Martyrdom

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"When he had said this, he fell asleep."—Acts vii. 60.

The subject which lies now before us is the record of a martyrdom; the violent and suffering end of the first Christian man who was called to give his life for the testimony of Jesus.

I. We are called to notice one effect of divine truth upon sinful men. We are apt to suppose that, where truth does not save, it does nothing. We are in the habit ourselves, too often, of listening to God's Word with the outward ear, without giving it any entrance. In this manner many of us have heard, I dare say, a thousand sermons in the last ten years, of which not only we retain no impression, but we never received any. The preacher might gather hope from hearing that a sermon had made one of his audience angry. There are those whom God's truth faithfully spoken ought to make angry. Those whom it does not instruct, it ought to irritate. This torpid, lifeless acquiescence, which is the common spirit of hearing, is a terrible sign, when we compare the hearing with the living. It was not so always. When an Apostle preached, some were converted, and the rest were angered. That was because there was a reality in the message. It came home. It could not be quietly stowed away amongst other neglected lumber in the memory or in the conscience. It was felt to have a life in it, and where it did not quicken, it stung.

Observe the strength of the expression here used in describing the effect of Stephen's defence upon his accusers and his judges. "They were cut to the heart." But it is even more than this: "they were sawn asunder in their hearts." In the list of martyrdoms recorded in the 11th chapter of Hebrews this phrase occurs: "They were sawn asunder." It was one horrible kind of martyrdom to which saints of old were subjected. But here the martyr himself is said thus

to torture his hearers. "As they heard, they were sawn asunder in their hearts." It is just the description of the effect of the ministry of the two witnesses in the figurative language of the 11th chapter of the Revelation of St. John. "They that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them," when they are at last slain, "and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth." The Word of God spoken by their lips had been as fire and sword in the hearts of the unbelieving. "They were sawn asunder in their hearts, and they ground their teeth at him" in their fury. Wherever else in Holy Scripture this figure occurs, the grinding or gnashing of the teeth for pain and rage, it is in connection with the future punishment of the wicked. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is as though the very torment of hell were begun on earth beneath the faithful and powerful ministry of the Divine Word. There is "gnashing of teeth at" it already.

And is that the word which we hear, which we preach? O, it is a grave question both for us and you! Well do you know that this is not the effect which the minister would desire, in this beloved congregation, for the word spoken. Not this: the very opposite of this. But only we would pray God that the effect be not nothing; powerful neither way; merely negative, merely nugatory, merely soporific. If we cannot see fruits of life, we would rather see anything come of it than nothing. But to do this the word must be first true, and next it must be brought home. The mere proclamation of sin and salvation, in general terms, will not anger any man; neither perhaps, in these days, will it arouse any man. We must pray for grace to speak as St. Stephen did, plainly, sometimes severely, always without regard to prepossessions and prejudices, be they ever so universal or ever so inveterate; to tell, as he did, of that hardness of heart which is ever resisting the Holy Ghost; of that coming demolition of all human hopes and human trusts, which will "try every man's work," as by fire, "of what sort it is"; and more especially of that spiritual worship, and that spiritual life, which alone God, Who is a Spirit, can accept or bless, when He *comes*, year after year, "seeking fruit on this fig-tree," and alas! too often, too often, "finding none."

II. There is one figure, more especially, in this motley throng, on which the eye must dwell for a moment before we fix every thought on the central form itself. That young man whose name is Saul; an educated, reflecting, moral man; familiar with God's Law and God's Word from his childhood; living already, living habitually, as he afterwards tells us, "in all good conscience" towards God and man; and yet an unbeliever in Jesus; and yet a hater of the light; and yet a persecutor of the saints: what a study is he for the thoughtful! what a warning, in one sense, to the religious! You see what the force of prejudice is; what the strength of early habit, of long association, of general opinion in the particular world (great or small) which is *our* world. Even conscience, you perceive, is not an infallible guide: conscience itself may be culpably unenlightened; left by our own fault uninformed as to things true, as to facts and occurrences which should change the whole course of our being: and if this is so, then we may walk each day by the light of conscience, and yet be all the time "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious"; a waster of the true Church of God; and have to speak, in after life, if a total change should have been vouchsafed to us, of "sinners of whom I am chief." Saul, the moral, the conscientious; the diligent student, the scrupulous worshipper; "was consenting" at this time "to the death" of Stephen, and "keeping the raiment of them that slew him." Let us all pray, as for a clear, so also for an enlightened conscience.

III. And now let us devote the moments which remain to the contemplation of that saint and servant of the Lord whose cruel yet glorious end is here set before us. Let us strive so to enter into his faith and hope and charity, that we may all follow him, in life and in death, even as he first followed Christ.

His testimony is now all but ended. But one chapter before we heard of him for the first time as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, full of grace and power," set apart, by the choice of the congregation, and by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, to a humble and blessed office in the ministry of the infant Church of Christ. We know not how long he laboured in that service; less, we are left to suppose, than one whole year: and yet those few weeks or months, what a trace have they left behind them! what a trace, and what a testimony. We seem already to see something of the meaning of those words of St. Peter, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years." It is a great encouragement to activity "while it is called To-day." There may be scarcely a to-morrow for us below: then let to-day be vigorous! Putting nothing off that can be done for Christ. Complain, if you will, of the shortness of your day, but never of its weariness. Think how Stephen, just because he was full of grace and therefore full of power, "did great wonders and miracles among the people," though his career was to be cut short as in a moment, by an end which seemed to speak only of disappointment and of defeat.

That was the testimony of his life; his brief Christian life, and his humble Christian ministry; in itself a mere *serving of tables* to lighten the Apostles' toil. And now for his death: how did he who had *magnified Christ by life* magnify Him also *by death*, and both alike in *his body*?

1. First then, he never lost faith. He did not say to himself, "All these things are against me." He did not say to himself, If Christ had designed to own my work, He would not thus have cut it short. He did not say, If this be the manner in which Christ's cause prospers below, how can I believe that He Himself lives and reigns above? None of these things. Never was his faith so strong, or his vision so unclouded, as in that last clamorous, riotous scene in which life itself was to be sacrificed. While his enemies are rushing upon him with one accord, his eyes are fixed stedfastly on Heaven; he is rapt above earth and earthly things, and privileged to behold in clear and bright vision his beloved Master Himself standing in manifested glory at the right hand of God. He sees Him, not seated in royal dignity, but standing as in act to succour; and bears one last, one crowning witness to His risen life, to His resistless power, to His omnipresent grace.

2. And then with what a hopefulness of mind, and with what a quietness of spirit, does he address himself to this sudden, this cruel, this shameful suffering! In the midst of the uproar of angry voices, and of the flight of blinding, stupefying, crushing stones, he has a majesty of meekness and a power of prayer not given to others in seasons of tranquillity and of repose. All the time he is calling upon his Master, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Not in the manner in which men use that sacred name, of God or of Christ, as a mere expression of pain or disquietude or weakness; or in the ignorant ejaculations sometimes heard from a sinner's deathbed, when for the first time he feels himself in the grasp of a mightier power, which must be propitiated by abject invocation: not thus, but in the tone of one who "knows in Whom he has believed, and is persuaded that He is able to keep that deposit," which he has long ago committed to Him, "against the day of His appearing and His Kingdom." "Lord Jesus"—my Master, my Lord, my Ruler and my Possessor, already; long known, long trusted in, and now not doubted; Thou Who didst bear my nature,

and undergo more than all my sufferings ; Thou Who wast named Jesus at Thy birth below, in testimony that Thou couldest save Thy people, first from the death of the soul, and then also at last in and from the death of the body —“ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ! ” to-day let me be with Thee in Paradise ! into Thy hands, as Thou once upon the Cross into Thy Father's, I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth ! and so shall I ever be with my Lord !

So then, my brethren, we may speak to Christ as to God. Whatsoever we would ask of the Father, we may ask of Him. And when we come to die we may set before our mind's eye the person of the Son of God and Son of Man, and be assured that in leaning upon that arm of power, in trusting in that heart of love, we are but following His direction and obeying His command Who would have “ all men honour the Son even as they honour the Father ”

3. And as we dwell upon the two other attributes, of faith and hope, so may we notice, in the last place, the example here given us of an exhaustless charity. As the end approaches ; as the buffeted, tortured, mangled frame begins to totter to its dissolution ; the dying martyr kneels down upon the blood-stained earth, and collects every energy of soul and body for one last, one crowning act of worship. That posture with which we allow any little excuse to interfere, that reverent bending of the knee in God's worship, which many of us never practise even in God's House, which few of us would practise in a season of pain or sickness, he deemed the fittest attitude even for a dying man : he would honour God with his body as well 'as with the spirit : and then, with a loud voice, the last utterance below of that testimony to which life had been devoted, he cries aloud, in the hearing of his enemies themselves as they stand with uplifted hands around, still thirsting for his blood, “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge ! ” He prays not, as some have done, that the murderers may find out their sin one day in punishment : he prays not even that the blood shed this day may produce a speedy and an abundant harvest : but he prays that that cruel deed which is still running on to its accomplishment may never be weighed in God's balances against the souls of its perpetrators. Thus he prayed ; and in one case at least we know that his prayer was heard and answered. There was one at least among those murderers to whom God afterwards “ granted ” the grace of “ repentance unto life,” and who now for many centuries has rested with his victim, loved and loving, in the everlasting joys and the perfect charities of Heaven. The prayer of the dying, we may well believe, is not the least but the most fruitful in legacies of conversion and salvation to the living. O let us, in life and in death, be diligent to use, one for another, the availing arm of intercession !

4. “ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” What a word to apply to a death so violent and so suffering ! “ He fell asleep.” He was laid to rest. He was lulled to slumber. The word itself is enough to take the sting from death. If that is all that death is to the Christian, surely we may fear it too much. But, alas ! the use of a word is not enough to deprive the king of terrors of his power to harm. We have all caught this tone about death. We speak indiscriminately of men going to their rest. Our word *cemetery* is borrowed from the same Greek term which is here employed to express the death of Stephen, and means literally a sleeping-place, a place of slumber and of repose. And yet dare we hope that all who are laid in that burial-ground are indeed sleeping in Jesus ? Is that the hope which truly comforts every mourner as he turns away from the grave in which his buried treasure lies ?

The case of St. Stephen himself may assure us that no circumstances of death can prevent its being this to a Christian. No anguish of pain, no confusion of surrounding sight and sounds, no mocking taunts and no assailing hands. It matters not whether the cause of death be disease or accident, the weapon of war or the stroke of the executioner. It matters not whether the scene of death be the house or the road-side, the field of battle or the desolate prison-house. These things do not either make or mar the true cemetery, the true sleeping-place of the Christian. When St. Stephen at last breathed out his soul from a bruised and disfigured and mangled body, amidst shouts of execration and hands raised in murder, it is written of him in the words now before us, that "he fell asleep."

Falling Asleep

BY REV. ANDREW CRICHTON, B.A.

"When he had said this, he fell asleep."—Acts vii. 60.

The Bible does not deal much in deathbed scenes. There are a few such in it, but only a few. There are two deaths or dyings in the New Testament at which we are permitted to draw near and look—to the solemn voices of which we are suffered to listen. But they are deaths without deathbeds—destitute of those poor alleviations which human nature craves for, the friendly tearful faces all around, the friendly hands to close the eyes which are fixed and sightless for ever; and yet, amidst numberless circumstances of pain, and horror, and shame, and loneliness, they maintain a singular calm wherein death is swallowed up of victory. We are witnesses to the one when we stand by the Cross of the Redeemer. We are witnesses to the other outside the gate, where "they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

I. STEPHEN'S LAST WORDS—WHAT THEY WERE. "And when he had said this."

No doubt reference is here made, strictly and properly, only to the Christ-like prayer for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; but I shall not miss the spirit of the passage if I include also the prayer to the Saviour which precedes, and so speak of the light cast on Stephen's state of mind by these his last two words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

1. The hope he had in his death. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The same thing in substance, and almost in words, had been said by holy David amidst the shadows of the Old Testament time, "Into Thine hands I commit my spirit; for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." No doubt this was a certain prophetic anticipation of the dying words of the Redeemer Himself. At any rate, that saying of David passed through *His*—"Father, into Thy hands," to Stephen's fuller assurance of faith, and fuller understanding of the gracious relationship between man and God—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

I could spend many words in showing you what a great hope this was. There is something very painful, very mysterious to us, in the severance of the body and the spirit. It means that the I, the *me*, my very self, must go forth from accustomed scenes and circumstances—whither I cannot now know. The nature of that state or world into which my departing soul must pass is not revealed. What comes after death—what new sights meet my eye; what new sounds fill my ear, I cannot guess. My spirit, my darling, my very self—where shall my

head be laid? what is it that awaits me when I have gone that longest, loneliest, sorrowfullest journey? Oh, it is so dark: it is so cold! If somebody could but go with me! If I had not to go forth into the night alone—behind me the dwelling I left with its mid-day light and its inmates, who can come no farther than the doors with me—before me the awful shadows of the grave!

And that is not all, for there is a sense of sin to plant thorns in my pillow: and there are awful realities of judgment, of vengeance ready to burst on me, to make death yet more than death. To die may be to be lost for ever; to bid adieu to everything peaceful and blessed; and to drink to the dregs the cup of God's wrath and curse. There are shapes of horror, fiends from the nether darkness, that gather about dying-beds to drag the sinner down to share their woe: "Whosoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Oh, who will care for my spirit when it flutters forth like a frightened bird—homeless, forlorn?

See now the sweetness of this last word of Stephen's, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." See the blessedness of Christian hope. It fills the gloomy portals, the whole dim land, with one form and face—the form and face of Jesus. The coming of death is the coming of Jesus. And the departing spirit is not sent out like Hagar into the wilderness, but is yielded up to Jesus. The light of your earthly life fades out in the light of His face, as the light of stars fades out in the light of the sun. They think you blind when you have only begun to see. They think you sunken and helpless, when you are borne as on eagle's wings. They think you dead when you have only begun to live. It is Jesus in Whom the infinite glory of Jehovah is softened, tempered for trembling human souls, without ceasing to be infinite, divine. It is Jesus, with the mark of the thorns on His brow, and the wounds in His hands and feet, come to claim what He purchased with His pain. It is Jesus Who went through death in its very deathliest gloom—Jesus, experienced, sympathetic as well as kind. It is the Resurrection and the Life—before Whom the grave of Lazarus loosed its bands and opened its doors—in Whom death is now swallowed up in victory. Oh! I would not think of death then as going out, but as coming in; as passing away, but as hastening home; as being unclothed, but as being clothed upon; as the twilight of the evening, but as the twilight of the dawn. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

2. His solicitude even about his murderers. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Sweet echo from the heart of a mere man of that divine "Father, forgive them!" The difference is not in the spirit from which came both these dying words, but in the mere solicitude and humble petitioning of Stephen, as compared with the authoritative mediatorial prayer of Christ.

This spirit—shining so brightly in the Master and reflected in the disciple—is the only spirit, I take it, in which a Christian can die, is a chief mark therefore of a dying Christian—the soul dissolved as it were in the Divine love, and yearning that all, even the wrongdoer, even the murderer, should be saved. It embraces friends first, and then extends itself even to foes. Even the careless world has caught a glimpse of the beauty and fitness of it; and there is no man who does not wish to die at peace with all. You have seen, I am sure, in your dear ones who have gone from you to Jesus, this strange solicitude, so Christ-like, so beautiful, crossing the shadows of death with gleams of immortality. You remember how anxious they were to reach all who were dear to them with their fond farewell; how anxious, too, as the decays of nature would permit, to charge all to make sure of Christ, and so of that blessed hope in which they died; how their dying-bed was a very fountain of solicitous affection which

flowed and flowed till it was sealed up by death ! And all the little heart-burnings, the suspicions and dissatisfactions, the sense of wrong at the hands of those from whom very different things were looked for—how they get cleared away, and all is peace, and all is love ! Then can a Christian in that broad light which shows him all human things in their real insignificance indeed “ love his enemies, and bless them that curse him, and pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him ” ; then can a Stephen say, though his wounds are open and fresh, and the deadly shower of missiles is falling still, “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” “ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

II. HIS DEATH—WHAT IT WAS. “ He fell asleep.”

The use of sleep as a name for death is not of course a Bible peculiarity, or a New Testament peculiarity. The heathens in ancient times, and all men in every age, have been accustomed to speak of death as a sleep, of dying as falling asleep. The difference between their use of the word and that of the Lord and His Apostles is that with the one it is confessedly a figure of speech ; with the other it is no figure of speech, but a most blessed reality. We have anticipations in the Old Testament of the Christian use of it—as, for example, in those far-seeing words of the man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz—“ Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” But in the New Testament, and first of all, in the words of the Lord Himself, this way of speaking of death has its proper tone : “ Give place,” He said, “ for the maid is not dead but sleepeth.” “ Our friend Lazarus sleepeth : and I go that I may awake him out of sleep.” And so Luke, the beloved physician, found it the fittest word to represent the death of the first martyr Stephen ; and Paul enriched and unfolded it when he spake of them that “ sleep in Jesus.” It was dear, unspeakably dear and consoling, to the Christian Church in its early days. Of the tombs in the catacombs of Rome it is said, “ The very name of death was unknown, even in that city of the dead.” “ In Christ,” “ in peace,” “ deposited and laid to rest in peace,” “ Valeria sleeps.” Such are the ever-recurring expressions of a faith which had shorn death of its gloom, and disarmed it of its sting.

1. The awaking which is in prospect. So the Lord would not suffer it to be said of Lazarus and of the maiden, the daughter of Jairus, that they were dead, because He was about to raise them up, and make it seem as if they had only been sunk in a deep slumber. And out of a Christian’s union to Jesus it comes that death is no more death, because its gloom is irradiated with the light of coming resurrection. This night is like those nights at midsummer when it is scarcely ever dark, and the fading lights of the day which is gone have scarcely passed before the sky is filled with the growing lights of the day which is to be. Through death, over death, extinguishing it, taking the heart out of it, making it like a drop in the sea, sweeps the everlasting life, as the Saviour says, “ He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

The exile in a foreign country will not grudge a long voyage over tempestuous seas, if it bring him in sight of the rocky shores of his native land, and restore him to the enchanted scenes of his youth. “ Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her ” ; and so for the sake of the awakening of the resurrection morning, it will seem to the child of God as nothing, that his soul should dwell for a while in silence, that his life should be *hid* with Christ in God, inasmuch as “ when Christ Who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory.” The work

which we cannot finish before the nightfall, how contentedly we leave it over to the morning, and lay us down, thinking of our clear head and more vigorous hand, when the healthier breezes blow and the sunshine streams through the window. There is a certain form of farewell which means "Till we meet again," in which the period of separation is as it were obliterated, and the past and the future meet. So is it with death; so is it with the resurrection of the dead. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour: it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." Lie down for a little while. Think of the day that is almost breaking. Remember, by your dead brother's grave, that it must give back the precious loan which you have lent it, we know not how soon. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

2. The peace in which a Christian dies. I must have a word about this death. I must speak my mind of this enemy. I have felt his breath on my face. I have seen him come like a great tide, rising, sweeping on, wave after wave. He is the cruellest monster, tearing with his claws and teeth. He has no bowels of mercy; tears and sighs which would move a heart of stone cannot touch him. He has no sense of pity for the suffering, nor reverence for the noble and good, nor admiration for the lovely, nor fear for the strong. Between the old and the young he refuses to distinguish; between the useful and the useless, the kindly and the unkind; or, rather, he takes the best. He smites down one whose life is golden and summer-like; he passes by another who longs for his coming as a blessed release. He crouches in the corners of the streets; he steals in at the door like a thief; and oh! no lion in the forest, no tiger with his bloody maw, leaps on his prey like death. Baffle whom you will, him you cannot baffle; you may take all the city except his iron citadel. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Peace! peace! There is another voice than the voice of wounded, bleeding, almost maddened nature, and it says, "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." For the end of a child of God is peace, unutterable peace. Not the sentimental peace which work-worn men associate with

Graves grass-green beside a grey church-tower,

Washed with still rains, and daisy-blossomed;

but a peace which has God's word for the warrant of it, and the very bosom of the Saviour for its couch of rest. Yes, I say, the bosom of the Saviour for its couch of rest. Have you thought what we mean by that sweet word "in peace"? Is it not that peace is the bed on which you lie, peace the warm covering which you fold around you, peace the very air you breathe, the sky above you, and the earth beneath your feet. Carry all this over to that other word of the Apostle, which is the true key to the peace of a Christian's death, asleep in *Jesus*. Oh, this is rest for the weary! this is home for the homeless! What a tenderness of enfolding arms! what a soothing sweetness of unalterable affection! what a strength of imperturbable calm! "Asleep in Jesus!" "So He giveth His beloved sleep!" We may well part with our dear ones, then, for this. Here it was the toilsome journey, the hurrying battle, the buffeting wave. There it is Jesus all, Jesus only, Jesus for ever! And if this be my lot, oh, I take back all my hard words about the destroyer, and call him *friend*; yea, an Angel of God to me. This, this is Heaven. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "Amen! Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Chapter VIII.

The Things which are Behind.

BY REV. AND HON. W. E. BOWEN, M.A.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death."—Acts viii. 1.

"Forgetting the things which are behind."—Philippians iii. 13.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death." It is not necessary to suppose that Saul was actually a member of the Sanhedrin. Such a circumstance is unlikely, for the Sanhedrists were not as a rule "young men," nor was there anything in the birth of the future Apostle to gain for him special entrance into that body. The position, however, which he held seems to have been a responsible one, for the High Priest was ready to employ him as an agent in the ensuing persecution. And "Saul" now "consented" to the violence of priests and people which burst upon St. Stephen like some pent-up storm-cloud. Prominent in that cruel, vindictive ring of men, taking his part in the wild, savage onslaught, was the pupil of Gamaliel. "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone," had been the advice of the master. The disciple preferred the weapons of persecution, the prison and—in one case at least—a violent death. "The witnesses," we are told—for this "fragment of legality" was preserved—"laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." We all know how, now and then, there breaks through the outward reserve, which St. Paul placed upon himself, some cry which shows how great was the burden which these early memories were to him, how they pointed to irreparable injuries, to acts of fatal blindness and ignorance, which no efforts, no zeal, no remorse could ever undo. We all remember the verdict which years afterwards he passed upon himself. "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Whether or not the martyrdom of St. Stephen was the starting point of that mental and spiritual development which was in the end to change the persecutor into a believer, it is impossible to tell. We may indeed be certain that the faith which was perfected by the vision of visions on that most memorable journey to Damascus had its previous history, that it was more than the growth of a moment, the outcome of that manifestation, the fruit of a miracle. For was it not one of the most remarkable, and one of the deepest, characteristics of our Saviour's ministry, that He never forced His enemies into faith by any sign that could not have been gainsaid by them? No "sign from Heaven" was ever vouchsafed to them. The sign of the Resurrection was withheld from those who had previously rejected Him. The Risen Lord appeared to none but believers. Apart, therefore, from the suggestiveness of the words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad," analogy compels us to believe that St. Paul, when the revelation of the Majesty on high was granted to him, was already prepared in his heart to be obedient to it. But what was the actual origin of that new mind is beyond determination. Was it something in St. Stephen's speech that started a train of thought? Was it something in the martyr's bearing that first moved and touched him? We can only say that it may well have been the case. But whatever the inner history of St.

Paul's conversion, there still remained that terrible background with its several hideous scenes of cruelty and injustice.

"Forgetting the things which are behind!" That is the Apostle's own description, written when the noontide of his life and ministry was over, of his attitude towards his past. The words represent an endeavour rather than a fact. We know that he did not altogether succeed in "forgetting." He was indeed sure of the Divine pardon. He was confident that he had "obtained mercy, because" he "did it ignorantly in unbelief." He saw in himself a living testimony of the infinite compassion of the Saviour. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering, for an ensample of them which should hereafter believe on Him unto eternal life." Neither was he tortured by his conscience as though he had been deliberately guilty of some foul and gross crime. At the worst, he had not consciously and intentionally sinned. None the less there are mistakes which, however honestly made, a man can never altogether get over; and St. Paul's mistake in "consenting" to the death of St. Stephen, and in relentlessly persecuting the members of the Church from city to city and from house to house, was one of these. But to erase, as far as possible, the past from "the tablets of memory" was his wish. His whole aim was to fix his thoughts upon the future. He forced himself to dwell not upon what he could not undo, but upon what he might, by the grace of God, still do. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal."

"The things which are behind!" Past sins! The graver transgressions of youth! The early lapses from truthfulness or chastity! The sudden surrender to unexpected temptation! The complete breakdown in an unguarded hour! Injuries which are beyond compensation! Such experiences have entered into the lives of many of us. To some extent they have been felt by all of us. What is to be our attitude towards these bygones? Shall we allow these recollections to accompany us, wherever we go or whatever we do? Need we harbour—ought we to harbour—these sad memories? Surely the life of the Apostle to the Gentiles supplies the answer. There must be true and sincere repentance for them, and then, as far as may be, forgetfulness of them. Doubtless there are no sins which are so constantly and persistently with us in after years as those which have resulted not only in damage to our own character, but in the ruin of the happiness or social welfare or moral capacities of a fellow-creature. To put any such piece of wickedness finally out of our thoughts until we had made, at the cost of any self-sacrifice, all the reparation in our power, would be an additional crime, a further wrong, a fresh cruelty. But even in these cases the time comes when it is right to endeavour to forget. When once past errors and faults have been recognised and confessed to "the living God, Who is the Saviour of all men," it is worse than useless to permit them to haunt us as ghosts which cannot be laid. Unless we keep the recollection of them under strict control we are only putting ourselves in peril of missing present opportunities, and are rendering ourselves unfit to cope with new responsibilities and tasks. There is no danger of the hardened sinner permitting the past, of which he ought to be ashamed, to weigh him down. He casts it from his mind, because he does not sufficiently care for goodness to trouble himself about his own evil nature. But we are not now thinking of the men or women of hardened conscience, but of those of real religious sensitiveness. There are penitents who have disgraceful bygones to regret, and have been brought by the mercy of God to regret them.

It is to these that the language and the example of St. Paul speak. "Forget as I forget. Stretch forward as I did. Press on toward the goal, even as I made my way on till the prize was won." We must accept the Divine offer of full and free forgiveness for all sins for which "we are heartily sorry." We need not be tortured by the fear that we have done anything which, notwithstanding our sincere and earnest contrition, places us beyond the reach of the Eternal Mercy. Christ came into the world to die for us, and His redemption does not fall short of the grosser offences of life.

O God the Son,
Not [for slight faults alone, when Thou becamest
Man in the Flesh, was the great mystery wrought ;
O God the Father, not for little sins
Didst Thou yield up Thy Son to human death ;
But for the greatest sin that can be sinn'd,
Yea, even such as mine, incalculable,
Unpardonable—sin against the light,
The truth of God, which I had proven and known.

Yes, in hours of bitter self-reproach we must humbly fall back upon the old truth which we have known from childhood, and which we love to teach in all its wondrous simplicity, apart from all the discussions and controversies which have grown up in connection with it—to the young lives for whom we are in some degree or other responsible. The mystery of the Atonement is in a measure beyond our fathoming, but the tremendous fact is independent of its explanation. "And He shall bear their iniquities."

"Forgetting the things which are behind !" We may have known what it is to feel remorse, but we must not become its victims. We must not let ourselves be paralysed by the guilt of old days.

Far behind we leave the past,
Forward are our glances cast.

Yes ! Forward to the fulfilment of the fresh calls which come to us, to the loyal discharge of other duties, to the faithful acceptance of further responsibilities. Whatever the years which are over and gone may have been—whatever the faults or the vices by which they have been marked—personal saintliness is still possible for us all. The past may be lost beyond recovery. We may regret it, but we cannot live it over again. "No wave on the great ocean of time, when once it has floated past us, can be recalled." But, until the intervention of death, the future is ours—ours to use or to waste. God help us to use it in the assurance that "all our sins, negligences, and ignorances" are freely and fully pardoned for the sake of Him Who died and rose again. "Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that shall condemn ?" "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended : but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize in the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Persecution and Increase

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"At that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem," &c.—Acts viii. 1-4.

On that day a great persecution sprang up. The A.V. takes the definite term in a general sense—"at that time" which it may sometimes bear; but there seems no necessity here for avoiding the more specific meaning. It is natural that when the flood of rage had been permitted once to break out, it should flow on and cover all the neighbourhood. It broke out like a flame, and instantly seized and licked up all that could be converted into fuel. The leaders of such a movement found it their interest that the passions of the multitude, once excited, should have no time to cool. The tiger had tasted blood, and now the creature thirsts more fiercely for another victim. On that day a great persecution broke out.

The favour of the people had gained for the Christians a brief breathing-time, and they had occupied it well. In the interval several thousands had become obedient to the faith. Of these a large proportion were priests, who might be expected to be of special service afterwards to the cause. When they had learned that the Scriptures testify of Christ, they would be better fitted by their previous training than disciples of another class for the work of convincing gain-sayers and edifying the Church.

But the popular favour soon failed the Christians. That protection seems to have sprung up as quickly as Jonah's gourd, and withered as soon. Already the defenceless heads of the witnesses were exposed to the full fury of the persecution. They were scattered abroad—the assemblies broken up, and the individual disciples compelled to flee. They betook themselves to the country around Jerusalem, and some penetrated northward into Samaria. Thus, although their steps were directed by events beyond their control, they were exactly fulfilling the Master's commission—first in Jerusalem, next in Judæa, then in Samaria, and thence to the uttermost parts of the earth. The six surviving deacons, and other prominent members of the Church, sought refuge in flight; but the Apostles remained still in Jerusalem.

As for Saul, he pursued his vocation. "He made havoc of the Church"; but he was employed as an instrument in promoting the Divine plan. The havoc made by Saul scattered the Christians; the scattered Christians were like sparks, kindling a great flame wherever they fell: "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word."

At this point the historian, according to his custom, abandons the method of general description, and exhibits, by way of example, the details of a particular case. The portion of Christian history selected in this section is the ministry of Philip the deacon. Two specimens of his preaching are given in this chapter; and I think these two have been chosen as a sign for all places and all times. The Gospel first reaches Samaria, and then the ends of the earth. The first example of Philip's ministry is among the nearest neighbours of the Jews; and the next is addressed to an Ethiopian, representative of the distant Gentiles. The first is a ministry in a city to a multitude; the next is a ministry in a desert to a single man. These two are types of all. And in both the preacher's theme was one—when he went to a city of Samaria, "he preached Christ unto them"; when he met the Ethiopian in the desert, he "preached unto him Jesus."

In the gallery of missionary portraits which this book displays, although some are larger, none are more distinctly traced than that of the evangelist Philip

The sketches given of his life and labours are very short, but very clear. He comes suddenly upon the stage, marches quickly across it, and disappears on the other side when his part is played. Very little time is allowed to examine him, and yet we do not forget him when he is gone. All his movements are remarkable for directness and precision; there is no ambiguous haze hanging over the horizon of his life. This is not the man who at first possesses ten talents; but this is the man who lays out his five with such a will that they soon become ten in his hands. His movements remind you of Ezekiel's wheels. Like them he goes straight forward, without turning to the right hand or to the left—whether in going forward or in coming back—whether on his way from the city to the wilderness, or on his way from the wilderness to the city. Like them, too, he moves with the Spirit, and by the Spirit: he goes not unbidden, and goes not alone. Where the Spirit leads, he follows.

Philip was driven into Samaria by the violence of the persecution at Jerusalem. This is the way by which the Gospel was propagated in those days. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. In this matter the plan of Providence has been to a great extent changed in our time. It is not by the persecution of Christians in one place that Christianity is carried into another now. In the cognate kingdom of nature vegetation is spread, not always and everywhere by one and the same agency. A part of the work is done by the wind bearing the winged seeds over mountains and moors, a part by birds carrying heavier fruits for objects of their own, and a part by the progressive outspread of the roots under the ground. There is a similar diversity in the methods employed by the Omniscient Husbandman to scatter the seed of the Word over the world. Missionaries are now for the most part *sent* out, not *driven* out. This method, though more gentle, is not less effectual. It is the spontaneousness of the scattering that constitutes its glory. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." On the part of the Church, it is eminently a reasonable service; and yet men are drawn into it by the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Two methods are in operation among civilized nations for filling up their armies: one is a forced conscription from the inhabitants, the other a voluntary enlistment. Both methods have in practice made good soldiers; but in its nature the voluntary service is the nobler of the two, and in its operation the sweeter. In this manner the missionary army of the present day is recruited. It is not that the disciples of Christ preach to the heathen because they are driven from home; it is that they go from home that they may preach to the heathen.

Nor is there any room for self-complacency on our part, when the two periods and the two processes are compared. It is not that we adopt the gentler method because our love is stronger: I rather think the Lord spares us the sterner method because our faith is weaker. If we were persecuted as the early Christians were, I fear, instead of imparting our religion to our neighbours, we should let go our own. Let us appreciate our privileges and thank the Giver. Let us not be high-minded, but fear.

Further, seeing we enjoy abundant peace, we ought to be abundant in our mission labour. The early Christians did much mission work, because they were persecuted; we ought to do more because we are not. Peace has multiplied our resources; if our efforts were proportioned to our resources, we might occupy a continent as easily as the hundred and twenty from the upper room occupied Samaria and Galilee. Our lives and our strength are not consumed by the fires of persecution; we should therefore devote more energy and effort to the service of the Lord.

Funeral of an Early Christian

BY REV. HENRY W. BURROWS, B.D.

"Devout men carried Stephen to his burial," &c.—Acts viii. 2.

It showed courage and zeal for the Christian cause, that men should venture to avow themselves attached to one who had just been condemned by the Sanhedrin, and stoned as a malefactor. It is not clear to me whether, when they made great lamentation over him, their feelings were still somewhat too much of the Old Testament type, and the lamentation excessive or whether the words are used to sanction natural sorrow, and to show that even when the Christian's death is most triumphant and leaves nothing to desire on his own account, friends may yet, unblamed, pour forth lamentations on account of their own loss. Nothing is recorded on this occasion of that anxiety to possess some relic of the martyr which we find habitual somewhat later. Possibly the Church had not yet attained to know fully the blessedness and glory of her martyred saints.

But though this record of the proto-martyr's death must always have a special interest for us, his was not the first Christian burial. His martyrdom is supposed to have taken place three or seven years after our Lord's death, and in the intervening time many Christians must have died. At this day we know not who was the first member removed from the new brotherhood, under what circumstances he departed this life—whether it was a baptised child that first was taken, or one of more note. Whether it was male or female, young or old, is unknown to us; but, however unmarked, beyond a narrow circle, the event—however much it was a matter of course that these early Christians should be buried the day they died or the next day, with the usual Jewish rites, apparently in simple continuation of the customs of their forefathers—yet new ideas must have come in. One cannot believe that mourners can have deposited their dead without thought of Him Who had lately been laid in the new tomb. They must have derived comfort from the fact of His Resurrection. A change would gradually be made in their way of regarding death and the departed. There would, by degrees, be formed on the subject a Christian sentiment, which was destined in time to create suitable forms for expressing itself, to produce those manners and customs of modern Christendom which are connected with our burials.

Let us examine this a little more particularly. When a baptised member was found to have breathed his last, one of the thoughts most forcibly brought before his surviving friends must have been that he whom they loved had gone to the Lord Jesus. They did not merely say, as the patriarchs of old, that he was gathered to his fathers, which is an equivocal expression; not merely, as David, that they should go to him, but he should not return to them—which again is equivocal, and may express a confidence of rejoining; or may only mean simple death, absorption into the devouring jaws of the grave—they did not merely say that the spirit had returned to God Who gave it; but they could speak definitely of the soul's being with the Saviour—for had not Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"; and they could give their full force now to the words of the Apocrypha—"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from

us to be utter destruction : but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality." Christians knew that He, Who had Himself given up the ghost on Calvary, was an ever-present Saviour, and, unseen, was nigh at hand to receive the disembodied spirit, which was already His by faith. This, then, when firmly held, would be the first great comfort to the mourners that their brother was gone to Christ.

The next would be that the Lord Jesus would, at His return, bring their friend back with Him. That return of the Saviour they vividly expected ; they thought it would come to pass while they themselves were still in the flesh, so that they trusted that they were parting with the deceased only for a short time.

These were new ideas, wholly owing to Christianity. So also, in some degree, was another—that their brother, when he returned, would resume his body. As the human soul of the Lord Jesus had returned to His body, and taken it again in a glorified condition, so would the soul which the Lord Jesus sheltered soon be clothed again with a body—the same, but glorified ; would resume it, never to lay it down again. There were indications of this blessed truth in the Old Testament ; but nothing like the clear announcements which began to be made in consequence of Christ's victory over the grave.

Doubtless this was one of the matters in which light began to be poured on the Old Testament. Just as the Apostles learnt to see much there of a suffering Messiah which they had missed before, so, too, they would find many passages falling in with the new revelation, concerning the resurrection of the flesh, which they had before overlooked.

Many Jewish truths were thus brought out, and added to. Christ had come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For instance, the Jews, perhaps, had spoken of their dead sleeping. We find such inscriptions in the Jewish catacombs at Rome ; and now Christians learnt how perfect and beautiful was the image contained in the word. Our Lord adopted it ; He had spoken of His friend Lazarus sleeping, of Jairus's daughter sleeping ; and now Christians saw the appropriateness of the expression as they had never seen it before. They learnt that the holy dead live, though the sensible manifestations of life are withdrawn ; that they will be awakened, and that they will rise refreshed, re-created, created anew.

If the disciples had already learnt something as to Angels attending on the faithful departed, and as to the place of their repose, and had been taught to call it Abraham's bosom, they derived additional comfort from our Lord's styling it "paradise," when He spoke to the penitent on the Cross ; and, above all, from the fact of His having Himself entered Hades. The sheep would not have to pass anywhere that He had not preceded them. He would not have visited any abode of men without leaving traces of His presence behind Him.

Surely, too, Christians learnt to regard their dead as scarcely separated from them, still one with the living. They felt that both living and dead were members of Christ, had communion with Him, and, through Him, with each other. They felt death could not separate those whom God had thus united. They somewhat reversed the world's estimate ; and, instead of speaking of the departed as poor, called them the blessed dead ; and spoke of the day of martyrdom as the better birthday. When re-counting their children, they refused to say of any that were deceased that So-and-so was not alive, because he had departed this life ; like the child who repeated "we are seven," though the bodies of some of the number rested in the grave.

Such are some of the reflections which occur to one in connection with the first funeral of a Christian. Time would fail us to trace through history the

progress of these ideas, or the various departments of life which they have affected.

You have often heard of the alteration of the customs of the Greeks and Romans ; how, after a time, they ceased to burn their dead, and collect their bones in urns ; how the employing of hired mourners, to play doleful music, came to be felt to be out of character with a Christian's feelings ; how men ceased to think that any defilement was contracted by touching the dead. We know the change which took place in the inscriptions on tombs ; and how, instead of bidding an eternal farewell, speaking of everlasting sleep, expressing hopeless regrets, the epitaphs soon began to speak of sleeping in Christ and resting in peace.

You know that it became the custom to bury the dead round churches, because a Christian's dust is no unholy thing, and has not lost its interest in our eyes. You can understand how the relics of martyrs were deemed precious, and how the anniversaries of their martyrdoms were esteemed their birthdays ; and men gathered round their tombs, and partook of that Holy Communion in which is celebrated and cemented the union of Christians with each other through their Risen Head.

More important than tracing this subject through history is its bearing on ourselves.

1. You are, all of you, every now and then invited to attend funerals : endeavour to make it a profitable occasion. Unless care is taken, it may become rather the contrary. Familiarity with such subjects is not supposed to be profitable to the officials. Then, again, English reserve disposes men to talk of different subjects, and even when there is real feeling to conceal it. There may be some present in whom little deep feeling is to be expected ; but try to enter into the great realities brought before you : think of what must go on, within the veil, in connection with each one summoned out of this world. Every earthly funeral has its correlative in the spirit world. As the body, so the soul ; as the body is conveyed to its place, so the soul to its place. There is an unearthly procession as well as an earthly. The departing spirit is conveyed somewhere. It has something to do with Angels, good angels or bad ; above all, it comes before Almighty God. Let each funeral help to give you a vivid realisation of these great concerns.

2. It is a minor matter ; but I would say most have, one time or another, something to do with arranging and ordering funerals, tombs, and inscriptions. Endeavour, then, to improve them ; to give to Christian sentiments due prominence ; to banish heathen and introduce Christian symbols. It has been long felt that there is too much gloom about English funerals. More music might correspond better with Christian hope. It gives a little trouble, but it would be sometimes possible to have some part of the service in the London church, though the body have to be afterwards taken out of town to a cemetery. The celebration of the Holy Communion has a special fitness on the occasion. It has been too much omitted amongst us.

3. Finally, the most important point of all remains to be mentioned. Do not merely study the history and theory of funerals, but prepare for your own. Preparations are of many kinds ; men should arrange their worldly affairs, and make their wills, for a double reason : (1) to save those who come after them trouble ; and (2) that their minds may not be distracted with such matters as they draw near their end. But this sort of preparation is of little consequence compared with another : "Prepare to meet thy God." Seek that you may have a part in such blessed hopes as I have spoken of to-day as belonging to Christians. It is an individual matter : it is a personal concern. We live in

society ; we must die alone. " O Lord, I am oppressed : undertake for me." " Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Let me be able to say, " Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The Martyr's Funeral

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

" Devout men carried Stephen to his burial," &c.—Acts viii. 2.

St. Stephen died in an outburst of popular fury. But he had such evidences as man has never had before or since, that he died in the favour of God, and in the full sunshine of His smile. He was consoled in his last hour by the sight of the glory of God, and of his Saviour standing at God's right hand to succour and receive him. The spirit seemed in him to have gained such a mastery of the flesh as almost to render it insensible to suffering. With a bruised and maimed body he continued to kneel down, and do the last act of homage to his Master, the last act of charity to his murderers. Could there be a spectacle more edifying, more elevating, more exalting to our nature than this constancy, this holy joyousness, this triumph over pain in death ? It is recorded of Socrates that the disciples who witnessed his nobleness in the endurance of death were singularly impressed by the sight ; the victory mind gained over matter in the philosopher affected them in an indescribable manner. But what was that triumph of Reason in death to this triumph of Grace in death ? Socrates did not die a cruel death ; the circumstances were not violent, passionate, savage, bloody. After drinking the poison, and walking up and down for a while, he threw himself on his bed, when an insensibility seized upon his extremities, and crept up his body till it reached the heart. When he opened his eyes for his last look, they rested on the friendly and sympathising faces of his disciples and admirers. Calmness and firmness under such circumstances might perhaps be achieved by nature—by the last strong effort of an habitually well-disciplined mind. But in St. Stephen's case there was every circumstance which could make death repulsive, shocking, frightful. Several limbs might be broken in such a manner of death before the fatal blow was given. Stoning was almost as uncertain and almost as cruel a form of execution as the being broken on the wheel. His brethren in Christ were doubtless not far off from the holy martyr, but they were quite powerless to help him ; and the faces on which he looked in his last hour, or rather from which he turned away to look on his Saviour, were those of furious fanatics, who gnashed upon him with their teeth. Perfect self-possession, joyous self-possession in that hour, a face radiant with the hope of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—was it anything less than supernatural ? Under these circumstances we are hardly prepared, perhaps, for the agony of grief exhibited by those who carried forth to burial the mangled remains of the martyr. They are said to have been " devout men"—a phrase which is elsewhere applied to pious Jews, " devout men according to the law," but which does not in the least prevent our understanding that these were Christianised Jews, who had received the Gospel. Ananias, who was the instrument of restoring St. Paul's eyesight, is called a " devout man according to the law " ; yet he is expressly called " a disciple," nor could he have administered Baptism to St. Paul, unless he had received it himself.

Unbelieving Jews are hardly likely to have buried St. Stephen, and certainly not likely to have made great lamentation over him; for it was forbidden among the Jews to make lamentation for those who died (as St. Stephen virtually died) by sentence of the Sanhedrin. I assume, then, that these bearers and mourners were of exactly the same class as Ananias of Damascus—devout Jews, well reported of and reputed in their own nation, who had received Baptism, and become disciples of Christ, but who probably exemplified Christianity after the Jewish and early type of it, rather than after the later development which St. Paul gave to it. And for those who believe that God's Word is full of wonderful coincidences, which come out in greater abundance the more we study it, there is something interesting in the circumstance that "devout men according to the law" ushered St. Stephen out of the world, and St. Paul (so to say) into it. St. Paul (as we have often had occasion to notice) sprang from the blood of St. Stephen; he was Stephen resuscitated; he went forth in the spirit and power of Stephen, just as John the Baptist went forth in the spirit and power of Elias. Now the last time we see St. Stephen upon earth, we see him in the hands of "devout men according to the law"—Judaism, in the person of its choicest and most unimpeachable representatives, deplores him, and sets its seal and lays its hand upon him as an holy man of God. And when he who stood up in the spirit and power of St. Stephen is to be introduced upon the stage of the Acts of the Apostles, "a devout man according to the law" authenticates him; Judaism, in one of its best representatives, sets its seal and lays its hand upon him as an holy man of God. Christ's disciples had everywhere the attestation, not indeed of Pharisees and Scribes, but of those who were Jews inwardly, and had received the spiritual as well as the outward circumcision.

But what account shall we give, consistent with the circumstances, of the conduct of these mourners at the funeral of the first martyr? They carried Stephen to his funeral (a word is here used in the original, which is also applied to the ingathering of a harvest, the sheltering of it in the granary from weather; we might translate "devout men *gathered* or *ingathered* Stephen") "and made great lamentation over him." The lamentation here spoken of was a formal Jewish wailing for the dead, in the oriental fashion. Among orientals our way of mourning for the dead appears tame; they beat their breasts, strike their heads, tear their hair, to express the vividness of their emotion. Our Lord saw something of this kind proceeding in Jairus's house, and He does not seem to have been pleased with what He saw; He desired a calmer grief in the death chamber; for before He restored the girl to life, He closed the door upon the minstrels and mourners. Now how was it that this vehement mourning, or rather wailing (the words in the original quite express as much as this), went on at the sepulchre of St. Stephen? Does not the wailing of those devout men on such an occasion seem excessive and somewhat misplaced? Was not Stephen happy—happy past all thought and all expression? Had not his ecstatic words, his glowing countenance, proclaimed as much? Was he not in his Lord's Bosom? Had he not seen the Lord opening to him that Bosom? How could they "wail" over one so highly honoured, so singularly privileged? If they must needs think of the loss which the Church had sustained in him, could not He, Who had taken him, repair that loss? The choirs of Heaven, doubtless, burst into a symphony of praise and triumph, as the first martyr entered into the joy of his Lord. But the Church militant, which should sympathise with the Church triumphant, responds to the triumph song of Heaven by the lugubrious wailing of earth, by the beaten breast and the rent garment. How was this?

I. The great wailing, which was to a certain extent ceremonial, and after Jewish usage, was doubtless intended to do honour to the martyr. It was as much as saying: "Though the world has cast him out, and though, alas! we, his brothers in Christ, were unable to shield him from the effects of their malice, we will at least give him the full honours of burial, and thus confess before men Christ, for Whom Stephen died. We will take this opportunity of publicly recording our protest against the Sanhedrin's judgment as an iniquitous one. We were too weak to shield him, but we will at least show all respect to his remains." To transfer the incident to our own range of associations, it was as if at the funeral of some person in our own times who had incurred obloquy, unpopularity, and harsh treatment for his piety, a great demonstration of public feeling was made, men of rank and station, as well as a great number of the poor, accompanying the coffin to its resting-place. A protest, coming too late, against the wrongful judgment of the world.

II. Assuming that by this great wailing is to be understood not merely customary funeral honours, but a somewhat extravagant grief, it is to be remembered that the Church of Christ was in its earliest infancy, and that the disciples had yet many lessons to learn respecting death and the way of viewing it, which only experience could teach. Nothing is further from the truth than the very common supposition that by the descent of the Holy Ghost at the Day of Pentecost, the Church was endowed with a full measure of light, superseding the necessity of gradual instruction in Divine Truth. Even the Apostles had still to learn after Pentecost the doctrine that "the Gentiles were fellow heirs and partakers of God's promise" in Christ by the Gospel; and if Apostles needed subsequent discipline in divine mysteries, how much more ordinary believers! As regards those brethren who fell asleep in Christ, it is quite clear that Christian doctrine had yet to undergo a development, and Christian practice an improvement. It is evident from St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians that those who died before the predicted return of our Lord, were supposed to labour under some disadvantage, and to incur some great forfeiture. It was a notion of this kind which drew forth the Apostolic warning: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep," &c. The devout men who carried St. Stephen to his burial had never read or heard these comfortable words. They had not yet received what I may call the doctrine of death in Christ, and the precept of moderation in sorrow founded upon that doctrine. Notwithstanding Stephen's transfiguration and Stephen's rapture, it seemed to them that the having been swept from the earth before the appearance of the Kingdom of Christ, was for him a great calamity. When the Lord came to receive His own unto Himself, He would not find Stephen; the violence of the enemy had robbed His fold of that sheep. Hence, perhaps, the vehemence of their lamentations. More knowledge would have made them calmer. We who have been in possession of that knowledge from our childhood, and to whom the thought of death being gain is familiar, cannot view the subject from their standing-point.

III. But there is a useful practical lesson to be drawn from the grief exhibited at the death of St. Stephen as also from the quieter weeping of the widows (later in the book) on the death of Dorcas, which we shall do well not to overlook. It is pleasing to notice the perfect naturalness and inartificiality of the character of Holy Scripture, even under the lead of grace. The history of the Church has shown that nothing is commoner than for piety to take exaggerated and caricatured forms. It may be true piety at bottom, and yet, from a zeal not according to knowledge, may so strain the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel

as to lose all naturalness, and therefore all charm. It seems as if any truth, whether in faith or in worship, if ridden too hard, would break down under us. Due reverence and honour to holy men, in whom the Spirit of God manifestly dwells—a deference to their judgment, an imitation of their manners, is a sound and good sentiment; but if you press it unduly, it will pass into Mariolatry and the worship of Saints, and become an absurd and blameworthy extravagance. The love of God's worship and the desire to make the worship of the Church militant approximate as much as possible to that of the Church triumphant is doubtless an element of all piety; but you may go so far in ritualism, and in the observance of symbolical forms and ceremonies, as to do away entirely the simplicity of Christian worship. And in submission to the will of God (which we may call the fundamental principle of piety) you may wind yourself up, with great reluctance from nature, to a sort of stoicism of feeling respecting calamity, which is a totally different thing from the sorrow-stricken but calm grief of the Christian.

Now in the passages I have referred to there is a reproof of all such affectation and extravagance. The Church loses St. Stephen, and though their loss is St. Stephen's great gain, yet these simple-hearted men do not strive to conceal their natural emotions of grief and disappointment. The poor widows, whom Dorcas had relieved, felt that in her they had lost their best friend; they do not affect insensibility to their loss, or pretend that God's dispensation in taking her had not cut their hearts to the quick, but give free vent to their grief in the presence of an Apostle: "They stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made." Nothing in Christianity forbids sorrow for the dead on the ground of natural and long-indulged affection for them. The sorrow which is forbidden is a sorrow like that "of those who have no hope."

And it is to be carefully observed that the consolation, which the Apostle administers to Thessalonian mourners, is addressed to, and therefore recognises, their natural affection for the deceased. He does not put his hand somewhat rudely upon the mourner's mouth (as some modern religionists would do) and say, "It is the will of God to take them; therefore hush!" He does not say to the wounded heart, "Bleed not"; but, "See whether this assurance, 'You shall shortly meet them again,' does not staunch the bleeding." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

St. Paul Before and After Conversion

BY REV. W. S. WOOD, D.D.

"As for Saul," &c.—Acts viii. 3.

This is the first occasion on which mention is made of St. Paul in the New Testament, and it represents him as employed in a manner little suitable to one who was afterwards to become one of the most eminent Apostles of the Lord, viz., in persecuting the followers of that Lord.

First, let us consider St. Paul's conduct to the Christians before his conversion. You say, doubtless, that it was most atrocious—that he was bringing distress and suffering and death upon men, who had done him no wrong, who were leading harmless and irreproachable lives, who were spreading the truth, that he ought to have enquired before he acted, and to have acted more mildly,

even though the result of his enquiries was not favourable. All this is very true. There is no doubt that he was very guilty. But still there is something to be said in his favour, something which he himself mentions in one of his Epistles, not however without acknowledging how little such pleas avail to excuse guilt. What he did he did ignorantly, neither knowing nor thinking that he was acting wrong. He had been brought up in the strictest manner—a member of the strictest sect among the Jews, trained up in the idea that the laws of Moses were the perfection of laws, the very handiwork of God, not to be broken or spoken against without incurring extreme guilt. All his thoughts had hitherto run in one channel, all his prospects lay in one direction. He might expect to rise to high distinction by following the path which his education pointed out: he would seem from what has been said to have already acquired notice and favour among the chief men of his nation. The Christians attacked opinions and prejudices deeply rooted in his mind. He believed them warring against the ordinances of God. He believed himself called upon to be a champion of God. He believed that he could not show his devotion more surely than by crushing what he called blasphemers. He might then, it may be thought, have made out a strong case in his defence, had he been called upon to justify his conduct. Yet he sinned very grievously. He afterwards looked back with shame and confusion of face upon the time when he persecuted the Church. He was in fact fighting against the God Whom he thought to serve. Now, is there no lesson which we may learn from this? Are there none in the present day who act, it may be unconsciously, like St. Paul, committing grievous sins against the Lord, under the false impression that they are serving Him? It is possible that some may be imitating him pretty exactly by holding up to scorn and derision, and so persecuting in the only way which is now possible, the true and humble followers of Christ. Let us learn to restrain our disposition to slander and evil-speaking and ridicule against those who seek to serve their God in a manner different from what we think right, lest haply, while we imagine that we are upholding the honour of Jehovah, we be found really to be fighting against Him. And more generally, let us learn to be distrustful of our own prejudices. However sincere and earnest we may be, there is a possibility of our being in the wrong. We may believe ourselves with all our heart and soul walking in the path which the Lord hath prescribed and yet be going directly contrary to the way of His commandments. If our views are founded upon His Word and His Church, no amount of firmness is too great. We cannot be too zealous in cleaving to them or too hearty in upholding them. But we must not depend solely upon our own judgment and set ourselves up and be intolerant of everybody else. Such conduct is bigotry. Bigotry is at least as often wrong as right, and when wrong it is unquestionably sin, and that of the deepest die. Learn we then from St. Paul's conduct before his conversion, not to rely upon our own belief in such a manner as to think it necessarily true, unless it be supported by what we know to be Divine authority, and secondly not to condemn harshly our neighbours, because their views, though innocent in their effects, are at variance with ours—lest after all we be wrong and so incur the condemnation of God.

Let me call your attention next to the *character* of the Apostle, before and after his conversion. You will find that no alteration was produced in the natural temperament of the man. Before the grace of God was bestowed upon him, he was evidently warm and energetic in the highest degree. He thrusts himself forward into the foremost ranks, although yet a young man. He takes a decided part in opposing one whom he thought wrong, he puts himself at the

head of parties in search of what he considered malefactors, he goes of his own accord and seeks a commission which should enable him to act with greater efficiency against the Christians. All that we learn directly, or can conclude, respecting him shows that he was of warm feelings, of decided and vigorous temperament, one who would enter heart and soul into any cause that he took up, and incur any amount of trouble and inconvenience for the purpose of upholding it. And the whole of his history afterwards shows that he still retained the same spirit. At first it would be no easy thing for him to undertake the office of a Christian preacher, for he was liable to be distrusted by men, whom so lately he had scorned and persecuted, and to be hated by those on whose side he had hitherto acted. The one would look with suspicion upon a man who had hitherto been one of their bitterest enemies, the other throw every obstacle in the way of one whose change of life was likely to be so serious a blow to their cause. Yet the knowledge of these difficulties had no effect upon St. Paul's conduct. He entered upon his sacred office apparently without hesitation; he continued in it without once faltering. The dreams of his early life, dreams of distinction perhaps as a Jewish teacher, he flung aside, and enrolled himself a member of a sect in whose ranks there was no hope for anything except persecution. Thenceforward he had much of trial and hardship; he had to encounter long and dangerous journeys; he had to risk the peril of conspiracies formed to destroy him; he had to appear before rulers and kings, before Festus and Agrippa and Cæsar; he had to face death itself, a death which he foresaw and fully expected. Yet none of these things moved him; he was ever foremost in every trial; he was ever ready to expose himself to hardship; one danger was scarcely over before he longed to rush into another: at the bar of Festus he tells Agrippa that king as he was, he might be glad to exchange places with the prisoner before him: the one sole purpose of his life, to be urged on and carried out at every risk was the salvation of souls unto God and the promotion of Christ's glory. So, brethren, we see that no change was made by St. Paul's conversion in the natural temper of his mind. The same feelings remained, but they were all purified and hallowed and consecrated by God's grace to the advancement of God's glory. And so it is in conversions now. We are not to expect that men shall put off all their habits of mind when they become true servants of God. We are not to suppose that all men thenceforward, whatever their previous natures, shall become conformed to the same model. No: there is room in the Church, as in the world, for men of every stamp; room for men of mild and gentle character, and for men of strong impetuosity; room for the decided and room for the yielding; room for those who by nature are suited to be led, and for those who are naturally qualified to lead. And in throwing off his sins a man does not throw away those features of his character, which perhaps led him most commonly into sin. God created each one with certain habits of temper; He placed him under circumstances calculated to confirm those habits; in imparting that grace which produces what we call conversion, He takes those habits, and instead of destroying, purifies them and makes them fitted to the carrying out of His own gracious purposes. He has that to be done which will require the aid of men of every kind and species of character, and so He moulds and shapes the temperament of each, to become as the purposes of His Providence demand, either meek and humble and patient followers, or strong-minded and determined champions, who, like St. Paul, shall fight the battles of the faith through evil report and through good report, in the judgment hall, in the dungeon, at the stake.

Let us now consider the ways of God as they exhibit themselves in the history of St. Paul's conversion. Who would have thought beforehand that he of all others should be selected to become so remarkable an instance of the Grace of God? What man who had seen his conduct beforehand, who had gone with him, and watched him exciting the Jews and asking fresh powers of persecution, who, I say, witnessing this, could possibly have imagined that so mighty a change would be wrought? Men would rather have been disposed to say that the very circumstance of his having been so great a persecutor ought to prevent his becoming an Apostle. They would have said that he had committed himself too far ever to change; that he had done too much mischief ever to be admitted into the ranks of the Christians; that he had no chance of doing any good among any classes who had previously known his conduct; that, in short, he had precluded himself from becoming the subject of God's mercy. But God sees not as man seeth; He saw what others could not, that in St. Paul there was what fitted him to become a mighty instrument of good. He knew all the motives which urged on this bitter persecutor; how he was acting in ignorance, probably in the sincerity of his heart; and notwithstanding the grievous guilt which this man had incurred, He chose him for His service in a different cause, and enabled him to work more and more abundantly than all his fellow-labourers in that cause which at first he had undermined and opposed. Now this may teach us a lesson respecting ourselves and respecting others. Respecting ourselves: not to despair, should we unhappily have sinned by throwing despite and bringing scandal upon the cause of God. He is very merciful and will pardon, and why should we not submit ourselves to Him? Let us never think that there is not room for repentance, and never be satisfied until we have repented and feel some ground for hope of God's favour. And next, with regard to others: let us never pretend to shut them out from God's goodness. It belongs not to us to judge our neighbour, and we cannot say however deep their sin may have been, that they are beyond the reach of mercy. When it is in our power we are bound to strive for the recovery of the guilty; when nothing else is left we must hope and pray for their enlightenment. In all cases, whatever be our feeling respecting the sin, we ought to speak lightly and tenderly of the sinner, seeing that God may have mercy on him, and if so what are we that we should have no mercy?

Lastly, let us think how great cause for thankfulness is suggested by the narrative of St. Paul. This is suggested by the language employed in the Collect for the day, in which, after commemorating God's goodness in having, through the Apostle's preaching, caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world, we pray for grace to show forth our thankfulness for his wonderful conversion, by following his holy doctrine. Remember that St. Paul was peculiarly the Apostle of the Gentiles. He did not first communicate to them the knowledge of Christ's truth, that having been done by St. Peter in the conversion of Cornelius and his house. But the Lord Himself designated St. Paul as His minister to the heathen, saying to Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." And no other Apostle was so active in spreading Christianity among the Gentiles. The others, as far as we learn respecting them in Scripture, employed themselves mainly among the Jews, and although we have little doubt that they extended their preaching farther in later times, yet they ever consider their mission as especially to their own countrymen. But St. Paul very early considered himself as appointed for the conversion of the heathen, and all his life long he laboured zealously

He was peculiarly fitted by having been born in a heathen

country, and by the learning he had acquired for this office. Probably the suspicion and dislike entertained towards him by the Jews at Jerusalem would have stood in his way as a Jewish teacher, and so the very circumstances which constituted his great sin and sorrow in early life were providentially ordained so as to turn his mind naturally to that field of duty in which he afterwards laboured so energetically. However this may be, the fact of his being especially the Apostle of the Gentile naturally directs our thoughts to that great act of goodness in our God, whereby He was pleased to extend the knowledge of Himself to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and therefore eventually to us. Our forefathers, in the days of the Apostles, were rude barbarians, worshipping stocks and stones, neither knowing nor caring for the God Who made them, but setting up in His stead gods of their own invention. He might have confined, had it been His Will, the blessings of His new Covenant to those who alone had been partakers of the old, His chosen people the Jews. But in His mercy He chose to extend His blessings to the world. In the event which we are to-day commemorating, He selected for Himself that instrument by whose exertions mainly the light of the Gospel was first spread among the dark nations of heathendom. Thence it came down to us, and through that gracious act we are this day assembled to bless our God for having enlightened us. Let us endeavour, each one of us, to show our gratitude, as the Collect speaks, by adhering to and loving and cherishing the holy doctrines which we have received, by striving in the various ways which Providence opens to us, to spread its influence, by living in the practice of its sacred precepts, until we are enabled to experience the reality of the blessed hopes which it holds out of a life beyond the grave, full of glory and immortality.

Scattering the Workers, Success to the Work

BY REV. EDWARD THRING, M.A.

"As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church," &c.—Acts viii. 3, 4.

St. Stephen had just been killed, and the words you have heard tell us of the first great attack made on believers in Christ. There had been signs of what was coming. The rulers who had crucified the Lord were not likely to leave His Apostles untouched. Twice already had they been imprisoned and brought before the Council; then St. Stephen was executed by the sentence of their high Court; and now the pent up rage against the new doctrines broke out. How many homes must the stroke have reached, death and imprisonment, with the fear. For it is no great empire that is touched, but a small circle. Two or three moderate sized towns and their neighbourhood, where most people knew each other, and many were related. Into a narrow space like this imprisonment and death, and the fear of them, were suddenly let loose. Try to set before your minds the kind of life of those days. Think of the searchings of heart that the Miracles, the Preachings, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, must have caused in every household. As rumours reached now one now another; as one or another heard or saw something positive, and brought the news home, how hearts must have been stricken with all manner of feelings as the sword that our Lord had sent upon earth pierced between every fibre, so to say, of their life, and forced them to test each other and themselves. And now came the further trial of imprisonment and death. Many a man, as he walked back in an evening up the well-known road, must have looked wistfully at the scenes

he loved, and tried not to think of the morrow. Many a wife sitting in her home must have gazed into the fields with tearful eyes, every moment expecting some new blow. Happy those whose minds were made up. Yet what a hurried flight ; what longing last looks as they fled ; what anguish for the left behind ; what prayers for the loved ones in the enemies' hands. No more happy days together ; no more familiar work in the dear old places ; but flight, scattering, imprisonment, death. Think of such a state of things breaking out amongst us here. What should we do ? How hard it would be to leave all and fly, how hard to stay and be imprisoned, scoffed at, insulted, beaten, put to death. Yet men felt then as we do now. Homes were as much homes. Fathers and mothers, women and children, did not love each other less than we do. *Therefore pause for a moment*, and think of those ravaged homes. Brethren, is this the "*therefore*" with which St. Luke ends his narrative ? No. "*Therefore*," he says, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." What a wonderful testimony to singleness of heart in him and in them. He and they had but one idea, the work ; and how it would best be done. All the sorrowful tearing asunder of old ties and the personal wrongs are nothing ; a complete silence is kept ; and "*therefore* they that were scattered preached the Word " is everything. Now this undivided eye on the work is a very different thing from the view of work and life common amongst ourselves. Personal success, I mean to say, is simply the one standard by which judgment is passed both by the workers and by others. Personal success. Nobody ever dreams of inquiring, Is there a real living cause, and has that prospered ? The desolate homes, not the spread of the Word through scattering, is the thought. And no doubt many in those days also took that view, and pitied or scoffed at the hunted men and women, whose flight spread the Word of God. If there is a living cause, it is worthy of any sacrifice. If Christ is indeed King and has a work, then a man is not a fool for dying, if need be, to do it. Now do not suppose I mean that most workers are working for themselves only, or that they have no idea of duty and Christian sacrifice, far from it. Yet look—the single-hearted simplicity of truth which saw in scattered families, ruin, imprisonment, death, only a further extension of the preaching of the Word and renewed success, is that represented in the working ideas of our generation ? Is the silence, that eloquent silence, about the ruin, and the pain, our idea of life ? Look at that standard, and then see, not whether we reach it, but whether English work is working towards it, yea, has begun to work towards it. I say nothing of the mere striving to win something for ourselves. That clearly, however common it is, is not what we are searching for. That must bring much disappointment, that must depend on outward things, and cannot succeed in earthly sorrow and overthrow. Yet before we leave this, let each think for a moment what his present strongest wish, his dream, is, and whether it does not stand or fall with prosperity and outward success—if so, it is not Christ's work. Yet I would rather draw attention to a far subtler and more unsuspected evil. I would draw attention to the thinking of the good object *first*, and putting it in our counsel *second*. To the setting Christian work before the mind as an object, but then in practice considering how am *I* to do it ? How will *my* plans work out ? instead of how can the work be best done ? What does the work require ? The first looks at Christ's work through self, the second looks at Christ's work, and at that only. There is only one cause which can bear to be looked at in this independent way, the cause of Christ. And this means, if we are speaking of ourselves, all thought, work, and action, which purifies or raises man's spirit, and strengthens his spirit life ; and if we are speaking of others, it means all

thought, work, and action that tends to make the society, be it school, or village, or town, or household, more truthful, more pure, more unselfish, more kindly, and happy. And the text supplies a good test of this. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." Such life is a seed in itself that bears scattering abroad and takes fresh root. The Apostles and their congregations were scattered. Let us take this. The test of good work with them was that the scattering and dispersion was a success. Now turn. The gathering a congregation, the having numbers, the wide circle of influence, the many ready to follow a man's word, these are the general tests both to the worker, and the world who judges him, of his success. And how bitter is the mortification when all this is scattered. *Therefore*, says the man who has worked through self, therefore my life work is ruined, I have failed. Yes, if the work is not seed work, will not bear scattering, he has failed. But the true work, out of the empty homes, and the prisons, can see a fresh sowing. This comes of looking straight at the work, and at nothing but the work. With us here this would mean first of all the public life. Each and everyone having steadily and straight before his eye the earnestness, the honesty, the purity of the life in this home of Christian education, where Christ in a most special way is setting up His standard. Will this bear scattering? Yes surely it is a seed having life in itself. If there is this singleness of eye on the main work, then the more you are scattered, whatever the cause may be, you are life-seeds sown by Christ, and your life is a success. Next there is the life of each, where each, steadily, and with a straight eye, looks at the work he has to do, the training he has to undergo, as blessed in itself, if well done for Christ's sake; and so it will be done steadily, regardless of winning or losing at the time, steadily, with nothing allowed to come between it and the heart. The heart will be set flat against it, with no temptation stopping the touch; and the touch will take a full impression, and learn well. Will this bear scattering? Yes it will. No power can take away that reward of work, when the free heart has got its work within itself in enduring strength. Fling such a one where you please, he has his life with him, it cannot be taken away. It is a life-seed ever springing up, however the outer world may alter. Hearts like these at home, or abroad, in time of trial, in time of peace, out of the palace, out of the empty home, and the prison, are ready with their "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.*" But, brethren, these things are not chances, or accidents, as too many are pleased to think. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap. There is the most absolute certainty in this. There is not one of you here who does not hold his own happiness in his hand to keep, or—to throw away. Not one who does not. Don't be deceived. Are you working for a cause? Are you, however weakly, trying to get a good cause first in your thoughts and actions, and to set your heart straight and clear at it? I cannot but think if the young really knew, or would believe, how entirely Christ our King has made a certainty of life, a certainty that His service begun early, and daily persevered in, is happiness, and cannot fail, that there would be more steady union amongst us. A society like this is just where there ought to be this union of life, and as for the scattering, as a fact we are scattered by various causes everywhere out of this life centre. Brethren, as we scatter over the world in all lands, and all professions, let it be the secret thought of every-one, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word,*" preaching by a manly life, and good example, if by nothing else. Then there can be no failure. The single eye and single heart never fail.

Preaching Christ

BY REV. E. J. BOYCE, M.A.

"Then Philip . . . preached Christ unto them."—Acts viii. 5.

The Samaritans were a dispised people ; the Jews had no dealings with them : they were neither heathens nor Jews, and yet, as they received the five books of Moses, they no doubt, in common with the Jews, were looking forward to the Messiah as their Deliverer and Saviour, and that He should be the great Teacher of things to come : for the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well confessed, " I know that Messiah cometh, Which is called Christ ; when He is come He will tell us all things " ; and many other Samaritans also, who heard our Blessed Saviour themselves, made this confession, " We know that this is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world." But those who believed were only a few compared with the many who did not know Him and had not acknowledged Him as their Saviour. A few Jews, a few Gentiles, a few Samaritans : the rest were still *in want*, looking for someone to come, or else walking in darkness, without any beams of light from the Sun of Righteousness. When Christ came, He came unto His own ; it was His own people, the Jews, who received Him not ; and yet, as far as we learn from our Saviour's words, it appears that, compared with their opportunity of knowing Him, the Samaritans received Him better than the Jews. But now the time was coming when Christ should be made known to all the world ; when there should be no difference, except between those that received Him and those that received Him not ; the time was at hand when those who had never heard of Christ, and those who knew Him imperfectly, and those who mistook His character and work, should all hear of Him and learn to know Him fully and truly. The day was near when Jew and Gentile, bond and free, should know that He, Who had been seen constantly going about and doing good, Who was the persecuted and crucified Nazarene—that this Man was the very Christ, " anointed to be a Prince and a Saviour."

This was what Philip went down to the city of Samaria to preach unto them. It was to tell them of Christ the " Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief " —of Christ the " King of glory." It was to tell them that Christ was the Saviour they needed ; that He was the *only* Saviour they could have ; that He was a Saviour willing " to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." He preached Christ unto them ; what Christ had done for them ; what He was ready to be for them ; what He would do within them. Were they enemies to God by wicked works ? were they alienated from Him through the corruption of their nature ? did their sins separate between them and God ? did they feel afraid of God's anger ? did they look forward with fear and say, " What must we do to be saved " ? how shall we approach God ? how shall we propitiate Him ? how shall we become reconciled to Him ? When St. Philip preached Christ unto them they had an answer to all these questions, a remedy for all these fears and doubts ; for he would set before them Christ Jesus crucified for them, as having died upon the Cross, the Just for the unjust, on purpose to bring them near to God ; having made by Himself once offered a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world ; so that now, by the blood of Jesus, those who were afar off may be brought nigh, and enabled to come boldly to the Throne of Grace. Thus would he preach

Christ to them as their only sacrifice for sin, by means of which they would find acceptance with God. And by virtue of all this which He had done for them, he would have a warrant to declare what Christ was ready to be for those who come to Him: the Way into Heaven, the true "Holy of Holies," and the strength whereby the sinner can enter into it; the Truth itself, and the wisdom whereby the sinner can discover and hold it fast; the Life itself, and the Giver and Dispenser of life to the sinner's soul.

Oh, how would St. Philip declare the wonderful mercy and goodness, the fulness and power of Christ, as he preached unto the Samaritans all that He was ready and able and willing to be and to do for them. He would tell the weary and heavy-laden to come and find rest in Christ. He would bid those that mourn and weep, and those that were weak and downcast, and those who were ignorant and careworn and full of doubts and fears, and those who were struggling against sin, and those who were weary of the world and hated its sinfulness and folly, and those who were in any kind of distress, whether afflicted in mind, body, or estate—he would bid the poor and the rich, the unlearned and the wise, the persecuted, the anxious, the faint-hearted, the earnest-minded—he would bid them *all* to come to Christ. He would "preach Christ unto them," as their Advocate with the Father, their strength, their refuge, their comfort, their sure support, their wisdom, their Prophet, Priest and King—their daily Friend, their never-failing source of victory over the world, the flesh and the devil—their "all in all."

Nor would he stop here: he would not only tell them what He had done for them, and what He was ready to be for them, but he would tell them what Christ would do within them. He would preach Christ unto them as ready to be the inmate of their souls; holding communion with them; making Himself manifest within them; transforming them daily into His image, renewing them after His likeness. He would preach to them Christ *in* them the hope of glory; he would tell them the mightiness of His power to mould every affection and desire, every purpose and imagination after His own will; he would tell them of the efficacy of His gracious presence in subduing the power of sin, and he would preach to them union with Christ as the means of life and the maintenance of life within the soul. Thus when "Philip went down and preached Christ unto the city of Samaria" he preached Him as the source of the sinner's *justification* and his *sanctification*—his peace, his life, his comfort, his wisdom, his righteousness and redemption.

Nor would he forget to set Him forth, not only as a propitiation for their sins, and the author and finisher of their faith and sanctification, but also as Himself the example, the pattern for the Christian to imitate—the model after which the whole conversation of the Christian should be framed. And as St. Philip preached Christ unto the listening multitudes of Samaritans, and proved to them out of the Scriptures what He had done for the world, what He was doing for His people, what He was ready to do and to be for everyone that would believe in Him and come unto God through Him: he would not forget to preach Christ as about to come a *second* time to be the Judge both of the quick and of the dead. He would remind them that we must all appear before His judgment-seat, that every one of us may give account of himself to God. While preaching Christ the Saviour, the Mediator, the Advocate, the Intercessor, the Friend of His people, he would not forget to set Him forth as soon about to be the Judge of all the earth.

Christ would thus be the beginning, the centre, and the end; the author and finisher, the alpha and the omega. Might not St. Philip have entered the city

of Samaria proclaiming the words of the Angels at the birth of the Messiah "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Can we wonder at his preaching Christ unto the Samaritans; at his seeking to make them members of Christ, to bring them into union with Him from Whom and through Whom all hope and blessing come to man, and in Whom all fulness dwells—fulness of pardon and of grace, fulness of peace and comfort here and hereafter; in His presence fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore?

Oh, who can measure the value of that blessing with which Philip went down to the city of Samaria? who can calculate the benefit of that journey which brought Philip to Samaria? who shall tell the worth of that sermon in which he first preached Christ unto the people? And its effects were marvellous—"The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake and there was great joy in that city." The good tidings ran throughout the multitude; they had heard of Christ: they believed in Him. All from the least to the greatest had been giving heed to Simon the sorcerer; he had bewitched them; "but when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women"; they sought no longer the devices of Satan, but they fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in Christ Jesus.

But let us for a moment consider: Is this the effect now? Christ is preached to you; you have as much need of Him as the Samaritans; Christ has been and is preached to you; His Word preaches Him; you have never been without an ambassador of Christ close at your doors; He has met you in His Sacraments; He has dwelt within these walls; you have, as it were, heard His voice; He has been evidently set forth crucified among you. Oh, has this people with one accord given heed unto those things which have been spoken? There was great joy in that city when St. Philip preached Christ unto the people. Do you rejoice to hear of Him? Is your profession of Christ sincere? Are you making your calling and election in Him sure?

Philip in Samaria

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria," &c.—Acts viii. 5-13.

St. Philip the Evangelist, whose career we now enter upon, seems to have been the forerunner of St. Paul in his work, as St. Stephen had been in his preaching. "Coming events," it is said, "cast their shadows before," and it seems to have been ordained that the doctrine and work of St. Paul should have a prelude in the ministry of two out of those seven officers whom the Apostles had appointed to relieve them of their lower and less spiritual cares. The forms of Stephen and Philip, projected on the canvas of the sacred history, give us some notion of the gigantic figure in reserve, who, when he makes his appearance and begins to run his race, is to fasten all eyes upon himself.

What moved St. Philip to go down to Samaria with the Gospel message is not recorded. Perhaps the persecution which arose about Stephen was specially directed against him. In the list of the seven, which is given in Acts vi., his name comes next to that of Stephen, perhaps because he was specially associated with the martyr, perhaps only because he ranked next to him as a man of mark

and energy of character. The name (like Stephen's) is a Greek one, and in all probability he, like Stephen, was one of those Hellenists or Grecized Jews, who had imbibed with the Greek language Greek associations and ideas, wider and more liberal than those of the Jews of Palestine. Hence he might be singled out by Stephen's murderers as a mark for special opposition, and might be disposed to seek shelter among the Samaritans, themselves the constant objects of Jewish aversion and contempt.

He went down, it appears, to a city of Samaria, a city of the district or province called Samaria—it might be the metropolis of the province, then called Sebaste (the Greek equivalent of Augusta), in compliment to the Emperor Augustus, who had made a grant of the city to Herod the Great; or it might be (and one likes to think that it was) Sychem or Sychar, the very city which our Lord had honoured with a visit, and where He had held a famous conversation with a woman of Samaria at Jacob's well.

The orderliness of the spread of the Gospel, both in our Lord's design and in the execution of that design, should be carefully attended to. It was to begin from Jerusalem as its centre, and first to permeate Judæa, the province of which Jerusalem was the metropolis; it was thence to advance to Samaria, the contiguous province, and not till it had been planted in Samaria was the banner of the Cross to pass on, and be unfolded in the uttermost parts of the earth. Now this collocation of Samaria (between Judæa and the uttermost parts of the earth) is not so much to be understood geographically as morally or spiritually.

And this leads us to say a few words on the religious position and character of the people, to whom St. Philip brought the Gospel. The Samaritans, then, may be roughly described as Judaized Gentiles, just as the Hellenists, of whom we have previously spoken, were a sort of Gentilized Jews. And it is obvious that Judaized Gentiles, in the good providence of God, might play the very same part which the Hellenists played—might act as a bridge between Judaism and heathenism, by which the Gospel might pass over from one to the other. The Samaritans were, in all probability, purely heathen by extraction. They were the descendants of those heathens with whom Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, had colonised and re-peopled the desolated country of the ten tribes, and they are described as having been originally emigrants "from Babylon, and from Cuthab, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim." The seventeenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings gives the early history of these emigrants, which is certainly a remarkable one. They desecrated the holy land, as heathens might be expected to do, by motley forms of idolatry, differing according to the cites from which they came. This desecration was not allowed to go without a mark of the Divine displeasure. The country had been laid entirely desolate, swept clean of all its inhabitants, according to the policy which oriental invaders sometimes adopted, or, to use the homely and vigorous image which the prophets employed in denoting a similar catastrophe, "wiped as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down." One natural result of this total evacuation would be that the beasts of the field would multiply and roam amongst the ruins of the cities. These beasts the Almighty made ministers of Divine vengeance. The country of the new colonists was infested with lions, who came up from the reedy jungles that lined the banks of the Jordan. When some of their number had fallen a prey to these beasts, the colonists be-thought them of the cause of the visitation. It was a sign that the God, Who had taken the soil under His protection, was displeased with them for their neglect of His worship. To remedy this error, they applied to the king of Assyria

to send them a Jewish priest, who might instruct them in the observances of the worship of Jehovah. These observances they adopted, and ever afterwards retained, although the sacred writer takes care to inform us that Jehovah was but one of many deities whom they acknowledged, and that the true religion was placed by them side by side with their national idolatries. When the Jews, under Ezra, returned from the seventy years' captivity, and set themselves to re-build the temple, these people proposed to join them in the work, on the plea that having received the worship of Jehovah, they were co-religionists, and of the same communion. The offer was rejected with disdain; and the affront of this rejection caused a rupture which down to the time of our Lord and His Apostles was never healed.

The corrupt religion of the Samaritans soon found for itself a local habitation and a name. Manasseh, the son of a Jewish high priest, being threatened with expulsion from the priesthood for contracting marriage with a Samaritan lady, permanently sided with them, and obtained permission from the Persian King of his day, or (according to Josephus) from Alexander the Great, to build a rival temple to that of Jerusalem on Mount Gerizim, and to found a rival priesthood. In connection with this temple and priesthood was a sacred book called the Samaritan Pentateuch, which now exists, and the date of which is the subject of much controversy. It is a copy of the Law of Moses and of that only, showing, however, many alterations and interpolations of the text, and one notable falsification of it, introduced to give countenance to the pretensions of the new temple. In the passage where Moses commands the people, on their entrance into the promised land, to build an altar on Mount Ebal, the word *Ebal* was erased, and *Gerizim* substituted. Thus the Samaritan religion was a spurious, debased, and mutilated Judaism. And hence it followed, upon principles which have often been exemplified in history, that the antipathy of the Jews to the Samaritans exceeded their antipathy to mere Gentiles. Nothing do men hate more than a caricature of themselves. Those who simply set our position and our privileges at nought may be tolerated, and regarded with nothing more than contempt; but pretenders to our position and privileges are counted worthy of execration. Accordingly the Samaritans were cursed in the public worship of the Jewish synagogue: no Samaritan could be admitted as a witness in a Jewish court of justice: nor could a Samaritan become, as we know that numberless mere Gentiles did, a proselyte either of the gate or of the covenant. And when the bitterest venom of the Jewish heart flung itself forth against our Lord, this was its utterance: "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" Even the Apostle of love thought that a simple refusal of hospitality to Christ, coming from Samaritan villagers, might be righteously visited by calling down fire from Heaven upon the churlish heretics.

These rancorous prejudices were of course entirely foreign to the spirit and temper of our Blessed Lord. He took every opportunity of counteracting them in the minds of His disciples. He marked out for special notice and commendation the Samaritan who had turned back to express gratitude for his recovery from leprosy. By one of His greatest parables He has made the word "good Samaritan" a sort of proverb in Christendom for a kind-hearted, pitiful, beneficent man. And there are few more interesting passages in the Gospels than that which records His interview with the simple-minded though sinful woman of Samaria, and His two days' stay in the city of which she was an inhabitant.

But while He eschews and forbids all animosity towards Samaritans, and indeed favourably contrasts them with the Jews in point of moral and spiritual

character, He gave no sanction whatever to their religious claims or their ecclesiastical position—an indication, by the way, of the spirit in which His Church should deal with those who reject her discipline, and set up a ministry in rivalry to hers. His personal mission being only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, His Apostles during His lifetime were expressly forbidden to enter into any city of the Samaritans. And an evident disparagement is thrown on Samaritan worship by His words to the woman at the well: “Ye worship ye know not what” (a wonderfully precise way of describing the vague conceptions of acceptable worship in which Samaritanism had commenced, and the motley group of deities which it had originally recognised); “we know what we worship; for salvation” (literally *the* salvation predicted by the Prophets, and wrapped up in the Person of the Messiah) “is from the Jews.” How clear is it from these words, and from the rest of the interview, that a man’s religious position may be fundamentally wrong, even when in his tone, temper, and character there is more that is open, and candid, and generous than is often to be found amongst the rigid sticklers for orthodoxy.

Enough has been said to show that a strict Jew of the high orthodox school would have had a vast deal of prejudice to surmount in carrying to Samaria the tidings of the Kingdom of God and the gracious offers of the Gospel. But Philip the Evangelist did not belong to this school. He was one of seven officers appointed in the interests of the Hellenist section of the Church, and probably was himself a Hellenist or Grecized Jew, possibly (like Timotheus) of Greek extraction on one side. His circumstances, his position, and his office would all give him wider sympathies than were to be found among Pharisees and Hebrews of the Hebrews. And it seems to have been arranged with the providential design of overcoming Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans that our Blessed Lord had resided in Samaria two days, and had exercised His ministry successfully towards the Samaritans. The Divine Sower Himself had cast in the good seed there, and the blade had immediately sprung up; for we read that “many of the Samaritans believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did”; that the request to Him to tarry with them emanated from themselves, and that, as the fruit of His compliance with their request, “many more believed because of His own word.” And it was actually intimated by Him on that occasion that He was then sowing a harvest which when it had come to maturity, His Apostles should reap; “I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours”; words which received a literal fulfilment when, after the labours, first of Himself and then of St. Philip the Evangelist, the Apostles Peter and John were summoned from Jerusalem to lay hands on the converted and baptized Samaritans, and to confer upon them the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

As for the original Diaconate, or rather the form in which the Diaconate originally subsisted, that seems to have been necessarily broken up by the persecution which dispersed the members of the Christian community. There was no more an organised Church at Jerusalem; only the rulers of the Church remained at their posts. Philip, though he had been appointed to be a distributor of Church alms, and to preside at the love-feasts of the Christians in Jerusalem, now appears in a new character, the exigencies of the times no longer requiring those functions. We know him only as an Evangelist or missionary, not as a Deacon or stationary officer of the Church. A striking proof that the wisest plans for Church Government must be subject to modifications by the Providence of God, and that ecclesiastical discipline was not meant to crystallize rigidly in one set shape, but to adapt itself to the exigencies of society and the wants

of the times. Yet while the form of the early Diaconate passed away, its principle remained, and extended itself to other Churches. We hear of deacons at Philippi, and of a gift of "helps" in the Church of Corinth, which probably was a sort of qualification for the Deacon's office. It was soon found everywhere that the strictly spiritual offices of the Ministry were more than enough to devolve on one man, and that the care of the poor and sick must be entrusted to subordinate functionaries. But as poverty and sickness offer obvious opportunities for impressing religious truth, it was felt, and felt truly, by the Church of the first ages, that the Deacon must be a minister, and must receive a lower grade of Ordination. Accordingly, we have even in the present day an order of Deacons, whose function it is, according to the theory of the English Church, "to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the Parishioners or others." At the same time the Deacon is to assist the Priest in Divine Service, to help him in the distribution of the Holy Communion, and to preach when licensed to do so. Thus the early idea of the office is not lost, though the altered state of society makes it necessary that the idea should be embodied in a different shape.

Of the Distinction Between Genuine and Spurious Miracles

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria," &c.—Acts viii. 5-13.

The undesigned coincidences which an attentive reader may detect in Holy Scripture are one most satisfactory evidence of its truth. The passage before us furnishes one of these coincidences. From the account of our Lord's sojourn in Sychar, which is given by St. John, a writer very different in character and circumstances from St. Luke, we gather that the Samaritans were a simple-minded, unprejudiced people, and that they were looking for the Messiah. The woman betrays the prevalent expectation in those words of hers: "I know that Messias cometh, Who is called Christ: when He is come He will tell us all things." And no less does she betray openness of mind and freedom from prejudice in gathering our Lord's Messiahship from the knowledge He had evinced of her history. He had done no miracle before her; but His accurate representation of her past fortunes was quite sufficient to convince her of the truth of the pretensions which He made. So much was she taken up with the marvel of His preternatural knowledge, that she forgot the errand on which she had come to the well; "she left her waterpot, and" (with her eyes, doubtless, full of wonder) "she went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" The inhabitants generally manifest the same simplicity and receptivity of mind. It is not said that our Lord wrought a single miracle among them; His discourse sufficed to bring them to a true conclusion regarding Him, a conclusion in which they recognise His relation, not to the Jews only, but to all mankind; "Many of them said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." It may also be noticed that conscience does not seem

to have been very much on the alert in this woman. Her moral sense is not highly developed, although she is an open-minded, unprejudiced person. Christ tried to reach her conscience by showing His knowledge of her present immoral life; but that knowledge only strikes her with wonder, not with conviction. She does not blush or utter a note of penitence, but immediately wanders off to the controversial topic at issue between her own people and the Jews, as if to ascertain His opinion upon it—"Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Judging from these specimens of them, the Samaritans seem to have been simple-minded people, with a sort of childlike taste for the marvellous, and an equally childlike credulity, keenly anticipating the coming of a great Prophet and Deliverer, but having the moral faculties imperfectly developed. Now it is exactly among such a people that sorcery and magic might be expected to make way. And the passage before us states expressly that these arts had made way among them. And thus the Samaritans of the Acts are true to the character incidentally ascribed to them in St. John's Gospel, though it is a coincidence which lies so very far from the surface of the two narratives, that it would be absurd to think of any collusion between the writers.

Not among the Samaritans only, however, but among nations in a much higher state of civilization, there seems to have been prevalent, about the time of the appearance of the Gospel, a general susceptibility to magical arts. The explanation of this phenomenon is easy. The religious ideas of mankind were in a state of fermentation, and the religious mind of Gentiles as well as Jews was in a state of high excitement. A general expectation prevailed throughout the world of the advent of a great Ruler. It was partly due no doubt to the dissemination of Jewish ideas and associations, which had been brought about in the Providence of God by Israel's captivity and dispersion. But there was something more than this in it. The mythologies of the heathen and all forms of false religion had become effete, and ceased to have any hold upon the mind of nations who had attained any degree of civilization. All men must have some religion; and so intelligent and educated heathens held on to the old forms with an occasional sneer, and more than an occasional suspicion, for want of a better; but they yearned for something truer, deeper, more satisfying. Pagan religions were fast undergoing a decomposition; everywhere the minds of men were prepared for a change. Now this feverish, unsettled state of religious ideas is connected in the human mind with credulity, with an appetite for signs and wonders. In such a state of mind there is a demand for the marvellous, and wherever there is a demand there is sure to be a supply. And to go beyond the phenomena to the real causes that underlie them, there can be no question that by the manifestation of God in the flesh, of Whose Person, power, and designs of mercy the Devil seems to have gained a gradual inkling—the powers of evil were stirred up to make a desperate effort for the maintenance of their supremacy over mankind. Demoniacal possession, which appears on the page of Holy Scripture contemporaneously with Christ and His Apostles, was one result of this effort. A great swarm of enthusiasts and impostors, who, by their magical arts, gained a wide influence even in Rome itself, was another. Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean philosopher of severely ascetic life, who was born three or four years before our Lord, is said to have performed divers miracles which are parodies of those in the Gospels. He claimed, like Christ, to be a divine legislator and a reformer of the world; and though much of his history is evidently fabulous, it is clear that he must have attained a great celebrity, and

wielded a real and extensive power over the minds of men, such as no pretender to magic could, in the temper of the present times, for one moment establish. Indeed, our Lord had predicted that there should arise "false Christs, and false prophets, and should show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect." And so it turned out. By the side of the genuine coin which God minted, and which had His image and superscription upon it, were issued from the mint of the Devil a whole shoal of counterfeit coins. The economy of the Gospel was to fare as the economy of the Law had fared before it. The commission of Moses was attested by great signs and wonders, by the ten plagues of Egypt, and by the magnificent passage through the Red Sea. But the sorcerers and magicians wrought the same wonders with Moses up to a certain point. They, too, changed their rods into serpents; they turned water into blood; they brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt. But here their power ceased, and on witnessing the next sign, which they tried in vain to simulate, they said unto Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." We have now before us the parallel passage of New Testament history. The Gospel comes for the first time athwart magical arts. The magician is forced to yield to it, and acknowledge that God is in it of a truth. He is baptized (though without any real change of heart), and professes discipleship from conviction, though not from conversion. There can be little doubt that he regarded Baptism as a sort of magical incantation, and placed it, in his own mind, on a level with his own spells. Probably some renunciation of his magical arts would be previously required of him, or, at all events, such renunciation would be considered as implied in his application for the Sacrament. It was not for Philip to make the gate of admission to the Kingdom of Heaven narrower than his Master had made it; and Jesus, in giving the Baptismal Commission, had said: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." Simon believed this much at least, that the name of Jesus was more potent than his own spells, and that the message of the Gospel, which Philip preached, was authenticated by God's own finger. Accordingly, on the profession of this faith, he was baptized. But there appears in him not a trace of real conversion, however strong may have been his convictions. We hear of no searchings of the conscience, no surrender of the will, of nothing but amazement and dumbfoundedness. And it is observable that St. Luke, in describing his state of mind while beholding the miracles of the Gospel, should use the same Greek word which he has already employed in describing the effect of Simon's own powers on the multitude: "He bewitched the people of Samaria . . . and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and beholding the miracles and signs which were done, *he* was bewitched."

Let us note now some of the characteristics of St. Philip's miracles, which distinguished them from those of the sorcerer. We may say then, generally, that Philip's miracles had upon them the twofold seal which those of the sorcerer lacked—the seal of God's glory, and the seal of love to man.

I. *The seal of God's glory.* We are expressly told that the sorcerer put himself forward, preached himself, fastened the eyes of the people upon his wonders, and their minds upon his extravagant claims—"he gave out that himself was some great one." Whereas of St. Philip it is said, in marked contrast, that "he preached *Christ* unto them," that "he preached *the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.*" He announced that a Kingdom which was righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost was set up upon the Earth; that the Devil's empire over the bodies and souls of men was broken by Christ's work of Atonement and Mediation; and that whosoever would come to God in penitence and faith might have the full benefit of

these priceless blessings. Miracles of a corresponding character were wrought to attest this message. In evidence that the Devil's moral empire was broken, "unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them." In evidence that a power had come into humanity, which could enable man to surmount his moral impotence, and infuse new energy into his will, "many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed." On the sight of these miracles, we are told, joy was stirred in the hearts of the people. But how was this? A mere wonder has no aptitude to produce joy. Simon's sorceries produced no joy, but only amazement and superstitious dread. What produced in the people emotions of joy was the glad tidings which Philip had brought to them, and which the miracles confirmed. Instead of giving heed to Simon and his pretensions, as heretofore, "they gave heed to the things which Philip spake" (i.e., to the Gospel message), "hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." Not but that the miracles themselves (like all that God does) were beautiful and beneficent things, which lifted up to Heaven the souls of those who witnessed them in a devout spirit, and wakened up from many a poor patient in Samaria a chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Where miracles redound, by many thanksgivings, unto the praise of God, we may believe that they had their origin from God, like streams which have their rise in the great reservoir of the earth's waters, and return into that reservoir again. But when they redound only to the glorification of man, and swell the chorus of adulation which is offered to some popular favourite, we may altogether suspect them. What returns to man in the way of adulation generally took its rise from man in the way of display.

II. St. Philip's miracles, like those of his Master, had impressed upon them *the seal of love to man*. They were miracles which brought relief to suffering humanity, to the possessed in the first instance, then to the sick and the disabled. If God is good, if His heart is a fountain of pity, if He is, even to undutiful children, a most tender and compassionate Father, these are just the miracles which might be expected from Him, when He departs from His ordinary method of working. But not a word is said of any beneficent character in Simon's miracles. They conferred no benefits on mankind; they were simply wonders that bewitched simple folk—threw them into an ecstasy of amazement and alarm. It is true indeed (and it may suggest itself to some as deserving of notice in this connection) that there are sundry divine miracles recorded in the Old Testament, whose first aspect is certainly not that of love to man. The plagues of Egypt strike us as miracles of judgment, and as being works of power rather than of mercy. But on closer consideration of this subject it will be seen that in every such miracle of judgment there has been a design of mercy, if not towards those *on* whom, yet towards those *among* whom, it was wrought; that the sharp punishment of offenders is, in Divine as well as in human administration, sometimes the greatest mercy to society; and that, as regards the miracles of the Exodus in particular, while they were sore chastisements to the enemies of God, they were the salvation of His chosen people, and are on that account recited in a Psalm, the constantly recurring burden of which is, "for His mercy endureth for ever"; a clause which sounds strangely after such a statement as "He smote Egypt with their firstborn," but which finds its explanation in the fact that judgment to a persecuting world is often mercy to a persecuted Church. And as to the general character of Old Testament miracles, it was in every way necessary that they should be sterner, should have more of the element of power, and less of that of mercy, than those of the Gospel. For Scripture miracles are signs, and are constructed so as to correspond in character

with, and be significant of, the doctrine they attest. Now, as the Law worketh wrath, it would have been unsuitable to the economy of the Law to accompany it exclusively with miracles of merey.

Two practical observations arise from the subject which has engaged our attention in this chapter.

I. True and divine miracles are never shown for their own sake, but purely for the sake of some doctrine or revelation, which has to be attested by them. They are never advanced as curiosities to make people wonder, but as signs to make them believe. Hence, as soon as the doctrine or revelation has gained itself a firm footing, the miracles, which are purely subordinate to its establishment, cease. When the Law was promulgated from Heaven there was a grand outburst of miracles, which both preceded and succeeded its delivery; but as soon as the people were established in the promised land, the miracles gradually fell off, till, in the time of David and the Kings, we scarcely hear of any of them. When the Gospel was introduced into the fallen world, it was accompanied with a galaxy of miracles, which however waned by degrees, as those on whom the Apostles had laid their hands died off, and Christianity had established itself in the convictions of men. John the Baptist himself never worked a miracle, one of the reasons of which may be that he had no substantially new message to deliver; that the repentance which he urged, the Kingdom which he announced as at hand, the Messiah to Whom he pointed, had been previously urged, announced, predicted.

Then do not imagine that God will hereafter depart from the principles on which miraculous manifestations have hitherto been vouchsafed. Not unless He has some weighty and substantial message to which to call the attention of mankind will He vary from His ordinary method of working. When marvels are bruited abroad, and profess to be wrought by some occult power, do not for a moment believe them to be from God, unless they are in confirmation of some message from Him of the weightiest import. The craving of some weak minds after communication with the spirits of the dead and other forms of the supernatural, has nothing to do with religion. Generally speaking, it is nothing more than that love of excitement which makes us discontented with this old hackneyed life, and craves for novelty at all hazards. It is true indeed that, as time goes on, new truths of science and new secrets of nature will be upturned; and the investigation of such truths will always be a subject of high interest to every intelligent mind; but all modern pretence of the supernatural (at least of the Divine supernatural) may safely be dismissed, unless the pretender can show a new doctrine of real import to humanity, which the signs are brought to establish. If, without the allegation of any such doctrine, belief is now-a-days demanded in the supernatural, the claimant must be impaled upon one or other horn of a dilemma. Either he is an impostor, or else the source of his supernatural power is infernal. In either case, he is worthy of condign punishment.

II. Secondly, observe well the feature which has been pointed out in all true and divine miracles—the correspondence of the character of the miracle with the doctrine which it is brought to establish. Thus, for example, the plagues of Egypt were all directed to establish the superiority of Jehovah to the idols of the Egyptians, and the folly of the various forms of Egyptian idolatry. This was the significance of turning the Nile into blood, and of sending a murrain upon the cattle, both the river and the cattle being objects of Egyptian worship while the plague of locusts aimed a blow at the worship of Serapis, whose office was supposed to be the protection of the country from those insects; and the

plague of darkness at that of Isis and Osiris, the representatives of the sun and moon, who were supposed to control the light and the elements. There can be little doubt that in all cases there was a correspondence between the truth to be impressed upon the mind, and the miracle which was destined to impress it.

Now, if this be a general principle of miraculous manifestations, what must we infer the Gospel doctrine to be from a general survey of the Gospel miracles? The very large majority of those miracles takes the form of relief to the afflicted mind or body of man. "Unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed." What an evidence that the Word so attested was, in any right view of it, an announcement of release from the worst sufferings under which humanity groans, an absolution, a spiritual cure, a glad tidings of great joy. Yes! wherever apprehended in simplicity of mind, as the Samaritans apprehended it, the Gospel is a message productive of great joy.

Philip Preaching at Samaria

BY REV. JUSTIN E. TWITCHELL, D.D.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria," &c.—Acts viii. 5-25.

I. PERSECUTION PROMOTES THE VERY THING IT WOULD DESTROY.

Immediately after the election of the seven deacons by the Church at Jerusalem, "the Word of God increased," and a large number were converted to the Christian faith, especially among the priests who had been intensely hostile to the new religion. Up to this time Jewish opposition had been confined to threats and imprisonments; but now it burst forth in such rage and madness as could be satisfied only with the shedding of blood!

These Christians were quiet and inoffensive: they made no quarrel with the government, found no fault with Jews or Gentiles because they would not accept Jesus as the Messiah, were in no sense disturbers of the public peace. The only charge that could be made against them was that they believed in Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour of sinners. This, however, was enough to make them hated and cause them to be hunted out for martyrdom.

It was at this time and in this manner that the first of a long series of persecutions arose against the followers of Christ, which scattered the infant Church and resulted in the martyrdom of multitudes. The object of these imprisonments and persecutions was to annihilate the Church and rid the land of every follower of Christ! Instead, however, of making cowards of these converts they made fearless missionaries of them all! They could drive these defenceless Christians from their homes, but they could not *silence* them. Every persecution and every prohibition set their tongues aflame with testimony, so that in the place of this one Church at Jerusalem there soon came to be scores of Churches, each one made up of heroes and heroines who would sacrifice property, home, and even life itself sooner than deny their Lord. Thus the wrath of man issued in the glory of God, and persecution promoted the very thing it would destroy!

The same has been true ever since in all lands and ages. Whenever and wherever Christians have been put on trial for their faith, have been threatened, imprisoned, martyred, the Church has grown more active, more aggressive, and more valiant in the defence and propagation of the Gospel. There were ten persecutions in the first hundred years of the Church's history, during which

countless Christians yielded up their lives for the cause they had espoused. Several times the enemies of the Cross thought they had crushed out the new religion ; but the blood of these martyrs became the seed of the Church. Diocletian had a medal struck with this inscription on it : " The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods is restored " ; but the fact was that the gods were then fast falling from their thrones, and that every martyred Christian was multiplying himself manifold !

It is believed that persecution caused the death of not less than fifty millions in the first four centuries : and it has been estimated that the bodies of these fifty millions, if piled together, would make a mountain bigger than any of the earth ! These martyrdoms, however, have been for the Church but " pelting her with drops of water," or " blowing upon her with the wind." God has ever had His cause in hand and has overruled all the assaults of enemies unto an advance of truth and righteousness which otherwise would have been unattained if not unattainable !

II. GOD PREPARES HIS CHILDREN FOR THE SPECIAL WORK ASSIGNED THEM.

Philip was not an Apostle. All we know of him is that he had been found " full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," and so had been made deacon of the Church at Jerusalem. But, like many another deacon, he may have been diffident, self-distrustful, and inactive. We have no record of his ever having spoken or prayed in meeting ; indeed, since his conversion, there had been little time in which to exercise his gifts or gain large views of truth.

His work had been to distribute the Church's benefactions among the poor of their number and serve the tables in their observances of the sacrament. When, however, persecution drove him from his home down into Samaria for safety, where he was called upon to become a witness for the truth, God put courage into his heart, unsealed his lips, and clothed him with wonder-working power : this enabled him to arrest the attention of the people and inspire them with confidence in him and in his message.

Up to this time the gift of miraculous power seems to have been confined to the Apostles. But now these scattered Christians need the same, else how shall the people be led to listen to them, and believe their message to be from God ? Here was an *emergency* which must be met : and it was met by the divine endowment of this man Philip for his mission in Samaria. He is made able to heal diseases, to cast out evil spirits, and work all sorts of wonders : and besides is inspired to tell so sweetly and so persuasively the story of the Cross that the people cannot do other than give heed. This deacon from Jerusalem, therefore, so to speak, is made a new man—is transformed into an evangelist, and equipped for his work !

Well, this same God is ours : and He will make new men and new women of us if He lays work upon us for which the transformation is demanded. Courage and comfort are here for all preachers of the Gospel, for all Sunday-school teachers and all Christian workers. Needed in the Lord's vineyard, and sent forth, they shall be furnished according to their need. Courage here, and comfort also, for all who are sought by the Spirit for consecration to Christ. Making this consecration, Divine aid shall be given to lead a Christian life. Summoned to undertake any task of God, or bear any testimony, the obedient and trustful shall be clothed and led and preceded by Christ.

III. PHILIP'S METHOD OF PROCEDURE.

It is written that he " preached Christ unto them." These people of Samaria were not prepared to receive him, much less to give him a candid and impartial hearing ; for they were spiritually diseased, deluded, possessed. Sorcerers had

flung their charms around them, and were leading them as they suggested or desired. Chief among the number practising their magical arts was one Simon, who is said to have "bewitched" them; amazed them and confounded their judgment; making such impression on their minds that they not only received with readiness all he taught, but admitted his claim to be regarded as an incarnation of the very God! With this man Simon, Philip must have come immediately into contact, or at least with his followers. The question was how to deal with *him* and with *them*?

He may call their attention to the Law of Moses which forbids all practice of magical arts and is severe in denunciation of magicians of every class. He may attempt to show the folly and absurdity of Simon's pretensions; may severely censure the people for allowing themselves to be so dazed and deluded; or he may sternly condemn the various forms of idolatry and superstition which he finds in practice. He seems, however, to take no notice of Simon or of his followers; to make no reference to the sorceries and delusions around him; but rather to have begun at once, with great tenderness and earnestness, to speak of Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of sinners, giving in addition, doubtless, his experience of the love and grace of God.

This was Philip's method of procedure. We do not read of him as entering into any synagogue, or having any pulpit or platform from which to preach. There were no Christian churches there to welcome him, no Christian pastors to combine for union services, or make preparation for his coming. I imagine him unheralded in the city of Sychar, a perfect stranger to all the people; no retinue of assistants or associates around him; *a lone man* lifting up his voice in testimony of a crucified and risen Christ.

He had no written or studied sermon to deliver; no carefully prepared arguments to offer; no witnesses to call on for illustration or verification of his words. He did not philosophize or speculate as to the origin of sin or the nature of future rewards and punishments; he did not theorize about the length of probation; but in simple language told the story of the Cross, and declared the blessedness of believing in Jesus.

He spent no time in the discussion of ethics, of dogmas, or doctrines, *save* of the atonement. He did not attack Simon, but superseded him by opening the eyes of the people to see their delusions and by giving them truths for which their hearts were hungering.

Here is another lesson for preachers and teachers of religion. Sorcerers and soothsayers and magicians of various kinds are still abroad in the world. Delusions are not yet all dead. False philosophers are around us. The air is alive with dreams and speculations. We are confronted by men who tell us that the old doctrines are delusions; who assume to have found a philosophy of religion full of marvellous illumination and inspiration, sure to reconstruct old faiths and forms of worship; who announce themselves as revelling in a "new science" and in new discoveries which challenge Scripture and are sure to eliminate therefrom much of its so-called divine element; and who profess to have made wonderful advance in the apprehension of realities in the spirit world! What should be our attitude towards these sorcerers, soothsayers, magicians, philosophers, speculators, dreamers? Nor that of attack—or even of wordy argument.

There may of course be times when sophistical argument should be met by counter argument, and when bold assumption should be met with equally bold denial. But "argument," it has well been said, "is the weakest of all weapons," and denial is never proof. We shall succeed in our efforts to make converts,

not by arguing with men or by denouncing them, but by declaring the truth as it is in Jesus, and leaving the truth to overcome error by the energy of its own life.

Many a Simon would soon be forgotten if let alone. Many a delusion would soon die if it were not kept alive by the advertisement which those give it who preach against it ; and many a false doctrine would soon destroy itself but for the publishing it has from lovers of the truth.

Some seem to think that the chief work of missionaries is to *attack idolatries* and bear down on false religions and superstitions with unrelenting power. Others assume that the chief work of Christian ministers is to argue down infidelity and atheism and all other isms by which the people are liable to be deluded and imperiled. This, however, is *not* the chief work of missionary or minister, but rather to exalt the Christian faith, testify to its peace-producing power, and illustrate this power in the presence of the world.

The world wants to-day what Sychar wanted eighteen hundred years ago--the simple story of the Cross -- and will receive what Philip gave that darkened deluded people. When he spoke of Jesus, the Immanuel, he broke the spell that was on them and brought large numbers to know the Lord. This will always be the case if we preach and teach the pure and simple Gospel. When the sun rises men blow out their candles and turn off the gas. Let in the light, and darkness will disappear. Preach and teach the *truth*, and error will be overcome. Give this waiting, weeping world the *Gospel*, and all superstitions, all idolatries will soon be gone.

IV. THE RESULT OF PHILIP'S PREACHING.

"There was great joy in that city " ; and no wonder ! When this evangelist appeared there I imagine him stopping first on some street corner and beginning to deliver his message. I imagine a few of the passers-by, attracted by the presence and words of the stranger, halting to hear what he had to say. Later, partly out of curiosity and partly out of hope that they might hear helpful words, a crowd collects--then larger crowds--stopping longer in the presence of this preacher, and becoming greatly impressed. Day after day goes by ; meanwhile great numbers listen to Philip's testimony concerning Christ--are touched by his exhortations, and, discovering that he has power to heal diseases and cast out evil spirits, are convinced that he is come from God. Finally, with *one accord*, they give heed and become his followers, until such numbers are converted that the whole city is filled with a great joy.

This joy is occasioned partly because of the many miraculous cures effected which brought relief to those who had been long afflicted with divers diseases and possessed with evil spirits ; relief, also, to their friends, on their account ; but was occasioned chiefly because of the peace and rest which souls found when they were new-born to God.

These people of Sychar not only experienced miraculous and merciful ministries, but the forgiving love of God. Salvation came to them ! Because of this they were filled with joy. A great revival was in progress there, and because of *this* song filled all the air. No wonder !

If you would find a soul that is supremely happy and thankful, find one who has been led out of darkness into light, and out of bondage into the glorious liberty of a child of God : in whom faith, hope, and love have just had birth.

If you would find a city or community full of joy and thanksgiving, go where the people are experiencing a genuine revival of religion. I do not mean where there is great emotional excitement--the clanging of cymbals and beating of drums, loud hallelujahs and vociferous amens ; but a calm, quiet resting of soul

after soul on the finished work of Christ. There you shall see joy—joy in the sanctuary, in the home, in the street, in the office—everywhere.

It is written of the town of Northampton, Mass., that in the great revival under Edwards "the people went everywhere singing," and that "almost every face was lighted up with unutterable joy." No joy is so sure to come, and there is none so great, as that of the new birth. The singing there in Sychar, I imagine, was like a band of music in the air. Oh, for the time to come when all through our land there shall be like song and joy, drowning all the discords of dissipations and delusions; when choirs and harpers and trumpeters shall be called together to swell the people's praise!

Fruit—Joy

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

*"The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake," &c.
—Acts viii. 6-8.*

1. They listened to the messenger. There was great earnestness and great unanimity. They did not rise up against the messenger to drive him away: neither did they remain unmoved, leaving him to spend his strength in vain. They came to him zealously, and they came all.

It is a great advantage to everyone when an awakening becomes general. Solitary Christians, with no congenial company within their reach, are like solitary trees near the sea-coast: the cold winds keep down their growth or kill them. But in a thick wood all contribute to shelter each. The spiritual life may be best maintained where there is much spiritual life all round.

So quickly and so generally did a harvest spring up to Philip's hand in this city, as soon as he appeared on the spot, that we are compelled to believe that a sower had previously cast precious seed into the field. The Master Himself had with His own hand sown the field on which His servant was now gathering a plentiful harvest. We remember how, at the call of the Samaritan woman, great numbers from the neighbouring town of Sychar came out and heard the word from the Lord Himself. This word was not in vain. One soweth, and another reapeth.

2. The people both heard his doctrines and saw his mighty works. Unclean spirits were cast out, and the diseased were healed.

Miracles, in the ordinary sense of that term, ceased with the first or second generation of Christians. We have now the same doctrines preached, and the same results in spiritual conversion, but not the supernatural cures. The miracles constituted the credentials of the first preachers. But perhaps to some minds the cessation of miracles may present as great a difficulty as the miracles themselves. If the missionaries of Christianity performed miracles once, why do they not perform miracles still?

If this question is not articulately answered, the questioner at least is silenced by one of the clearest and surest of all analogies. It is certain and easily demonstrable that some great energy was put forth by the Creator at the beginning of the present order of nature which is not continued now. To set the world agoing at first, powers were necessary that are not necessary and are not put forth to keep it going after its course has begun. The forces of nature now acting are sufficient to account for the motion of the heavenly bodies, but not to account for how they began to move. The present organic laws are sufficient

to account for the continuance of the species, but not to account for its commencement. According to the ordinary laws or sequences of nature, every creature produces its kind ; but we know of no law that could produce a creature where there was no such creature previously in existence. Thus a power must have been put forth to begin the present cosmos, which has ceased, and never operates now. Why then should it be thought a thing impossible that God should exert a power to establish the Gospel at first, which is not needed and is not exerted to keep it going ? This is what the Scriptures declare. The declaration is in most perfect accord with what we know of God's method in the material department of His Kingdom. The constant process of generation is as wise and wonderful as the miracle of creation. So, although the miracles that introduced Christianity are not now presented to us, it does not follow that they were greater works than those that occur now in conversion by the ministry of the Spirit. The greater and the better work is that which continues to this day. The unclean spirits are cast out, the aliens are reconciled, the guilty forgiven, and the corrupt renewed. " Greater works than these," said the Lord to His followers—" greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to My Father." The converting and sanctifying work that His disciples, by the ministry of the Spirit, were honoured to do after His Ascension, were, in His esteem, greater works than those miracles—such as the feeding of five thousand, and stilling the storm—which He had exhibited in the exercise of His Divine power over the elements of nature.

3. There was great joy in that city. Hear this, ye butterfly flutterers, that flit from flower to flower, satiate with each sweet as soon as you alight on it, and hastening unhappy to another, trying every flower all day, and at night bringing no honey home ; hear this, all ye who study hard to keep religion at arm's-length, lest it should cast a gloom over your heart or your home ; hear this : When an earnest missionary—a man who risked his life for Christ's name—preached in a city, and when the people came out in crowds and hung upon the lips of the strange revivalist, the citizens, instead of growing gloomy, became very glad. This is a phenomenon worthy of your study.

But beware lest you mistake its meaning. The instinct which prompts the vain and worldly to shut the door and keep earnest religion outside, lest it should mar their happiness, is a true instinct. Every creature after its kind. Every creature's instinct is true for its own preservation. The apprehension that Christ's entrance into the vain or vicious heart would be the death of its joy is a just apprehension. The devils believe this, and tremble at its truth. " What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus ? " To open your whole heart for a whole Christ—to take into your bosom the Christ Who was crucified for sin, does indeed torment the old man ; and the old man, a strong man armed, keeps his goods in peace as long as he can. The old man will not be spared at Christ's coming ; he will be crucified. When he is put off a new nature is put on, and the new nature has new joys. There was great joy in that city when Christ was preached to the citizens. This, however, is the ultimate result, not the first effect of such preaching. " This Child is set for the *fall* and the *rising* again of many in Israel." These Samaritans, when we get a glimpse of them, are bearing home their sheaves with rejoicing ; but the seed-time was moist with their tears. The pleasures of sin have been rent off, and the patient cried at the rending ; but the joy of the Lord has now come.

In the world of a man's own heart and life he lived without God ; lived and laughed because God was not there ; trembled sometimes in the midst of his mirth with an instinctive dread lest God should burst into his world and quench

its mirth in wrath. But at length the Stranger Who long knocked outside has come in. At His presence the former joys fled; but with His presence come new joys—the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

Some people at some times—and I mention this outward and visible thing at present mainly for the light which it throws as an analogy on another that is secret and unseen—are found willing to convert the sweet still rest of night into a scene of crowded, toilsome revelry. They light up the darkness into a kind of artificial brilliance, and deck themselves into a kind of conventional beauty; and they toil like navvies in a close, crowded, suffocating room. When the sun arises on this scene its hollowness is detected, and its false brilliancy put to shame. How dull the flicker of the lamps is now! how yellow the flush that glowed on the heated cheek! how tawdry and dusty the light flowing robes! They are all fain to get out of sight.

But yonder are two youths on the mountain-top, there in time to greet the sun's rising. They drink in the golden glory that precedes and accompanies his appearing in the east; and then, in his mild morning light, they search among the grass for the flowers that bend their necks to anticipate his coming, and open their bosoms to take in his light.

Suppose now that one of those night revellers should get a glimpse of these two as he is skulking home, and should say, "These are dull fellows that shut their cold hearts against all pleasure." It is sheer ignorance and impudence. Those youths take in more joy—more natural human delight—in an hour of their morning walk than the souls of that whole company have capacity to contain.

In like manner, in the secret of a soul, they make a great mistake who think that to abandon the crackling thorns of ungodly mirth is to plunge into spiritual gloom. They who through Christ have been reconciled to God, and walk in the light of His countenance, have indeed allowed one kind of happiness to be chased away; but it is like changing the flickering of the night lamp for the risen sun, and the breath of the dancing hall when the night is far spent for the morning breeze on the mountain.

There was joy in that city. Christ offered to a city or a soul, and kept out, seems like a cloud of wrath hanging in the heavens over it—a terror; but Christ freely offered, and believingly accepted, by a city or a soul, becomes a joy which life could not give, and death cannot destroy.

The Christian's Joy

BY REV. FREDERICK HARPER, M.A.

"There was great joy in that city."—Acts viii. 8.

The early Christians were full of joy. They were so whole-hearted. Their faith was so simple. In Acts ii. 46 it says, "They . . . did eat their meat with gladness." In Acts xiii. 52 we read, "The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." The Thessalonians "received the Word of God in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." They found to their great and endless comfort that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." "Joy" comes next to love.

Most certainly, then, God would have His people rejoice. He has told them to do so. "Rejoice," said the great Master, "because your names are written in Heaven." "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

“And there was great joy in that city.”

I. THERE IS JOY IN FAITH. God's Word speaks of “joy and peace in believing.” How many desire joy and peace *before* believing! That is not God's way. The Philippian jailer “*rejoiced, believing* in God with all his house.” And so may we. There is joy in faith because faith links us to Christ. And never forget, CHRIST HIMSELF is the Christian's joy. And Christ never changes.

II. THERE IS JOY IN HOPE. “We rejoice in hope.” Hence a good man once said, “I am on the bright side of seventy.” The Christian is always “on the bright side.” He has a hope—a blessed hope—as bright as grace can make it. A hope of being *with* Christ and being *like* Christ. To live is Christ. To die is gain. Life is leaning on His arm. Death is resting on His breast. And in His presence is fulness of joy.

III. THERE IS JOY IN WORK. Who can tell the joy of St. Andrew, the first Christian missionary, when he brought his own brother to Christ? And we, too, have tasted St. Andrew's joy. (Comp. 1 Thess. ii. 19).

IV. THERE IS JOY IN TEMPTATION. St. James says, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” If a Christian is much tempted by the devil, may we not conclude that he is rich in faith or other graces, or else the evil one would not take so much trouble with him? The pirates do not attack the empty vessel as it goes out, but the ship laden with precious things homeward-bound. Besides, there is the joy of overcoming temptation, of being “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

V. THERE IS JOY IN COMMUNION WITH GOD. We may come boldly to Him. We may make known all our wants. So said the Master. “Ask, and ye shall receive, that *your joy may be full*.” Joy, great joy, we have in studying God's Word. As one who finds great spoil, we rejoice therein. His words are the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. His promises are all sure in Christ. We marvel not that Mary sat at His feet and heard that Word, as it fell from the lips of Him Who is “fairer than the children of men.” And there is a sweet joy in praise, especially when enabled to sing “a new song” for “new mercies” received.

VI. THERE IS JOY IN CONSECRATION. To give up ourselves to Christ, to be His slaves, to be no longer our own, but *altogether* His—this is joy all joy excelling. To be “all for Jesus,” to delight to do His will, to trust Him every moment; why then the very Heavens seemed opened to us.

Christ would have His people share His joy with Him. “These things I speak that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” “My peace I give unto you.” Yes, we know that. But more, *My joy* I give unto you.” The Lord makes His people peaceful with *His own* peace, and makes them glad with *the joy of His own heart*. And this joy *abides*. “Your joy no man taketh from you.” All around withers, dies, fades, but this joy grows wider and deeper till it merges in the eternal joys of Heaven.

Someone, it may be, says, “Alas! I have lost this joy. I had it once. But it is gone like a sweet dream.” No doubt this is a very common case. The warmth of the first love has cooled, and with it the joy. Let such an one examine himself. “Is there any sin that I cherish? Do I use as much as I ought the two great means of grace—God's Word, and prayer? Am I diligent in all good works?” Then let him take the words God Himself has given, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation,” to the Throne of Grace, and his days shall be as the days of Heaven upon earth. With a simple faith wholly fixed on Christ, and a saintly life consecrated to His service, the oil of joy will be richly poured upon him.

Above all, if you desire more joy seek for an increase of the Holy Spirit. Let this be your unceasing prayer—

Come, Holy Ghost, my soul inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.

Then we shall be able to say and to sing like the old Jewish prophet, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

To sum up all in a single line—if any Christian would enter into "full joy" here on earth, let him remember that Christ Himself is his joy, and let him surrender in all things his own will to Christ's will

Gospel Joy

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"There was great joy in that city."—Acts viii. 8.

The first words of this chapter tell of nothing but calamity to the young Church of Christ. But calamity itself, in God's hand, may be anything rather than an unmixed evil: and so it was here.

"And Saul was consenting to his slaughter." He uses the same word himself, in the 22nd chapter of this book, in converse with his Lord and Master, with reference to this very time. It is a very strong word, expressive of hearty approval and thorough sympathy. What Saul saw of Stephen's fervent faith, his deep piety, and his marvellous love, produced at the time no impression. Hard indeed is man's heart till God softens it. And marvellous is the change which God can work and does work in the hardest heart, when He is pleased to "command the light to shine out of darkness." That time, for Saul, was not yet.

"And there arose on that day a great persecution against the Christian congregation in Jerusalem." This first taste of blood only whetted the appetite of the persecutors. That day was the beginning of a changed order of things for the infant Church. The martyrdom of Stephen was the signal for a general persecution.

"And all were dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria," and further still, as we shall presently learn, "except the Apostles." They remained for the present at head quarters, to be the central authority, the general referees, and the wise and watchful counsellors, of the whole body.

"And devout men joined in burying Stephen, and made a great wailing over him." This word "devout" is applied, in St. Luke's Gospel, to the aged Simeon. It is applied, in the narrative of the Day of Pentecost, to the persons who were gathered together by the rumour of the great miracle. There is no reason, therefore, for restricting it here, as some would do, to Jewish proselytes not yet converted to the Gospel; though it might well be that, as Stephen appears to have belonged to the Hellenistic rather than the Hebrew portion of the Church, so the task of doing honour to his lifeless body may have been undertaken by persons of the same section; that, namely, which was composed of Greek-speaking Jews, and not of Jews who had adhered to their national home and tongue.

We love to believe, at all events, that these "devout men" were believers, like him whom they mourned; and that we see here the sanction of Apostolical times given to that mourning over deceased friends, which nature prompts and which grace should only regulate and soften. There are Christian tears over the dead, as well as tears of uncontrolled passion: there is a sorrowing *as without hope*, and there is a sorrowing full of hope, a sorrowing bright with immortality.

"But Saul was making havoc of the congregation"; was maltreating and outraging, by all manner of violence, the members of the Christian Church at Jerusalem; "entering into their several houses, and dragging (away) both men and women gave them over into custody." There was no pretence of legality in such proceedings: but he had the rulers with him in this mad career, and could rely confidently upon their connivance.

And now we are to see a Divine hand overruling for good all this suffering.

"They then that were dispersed went about proclaiming the glad tidings of the Word." "The Word" is God's message; the announcement which God makes when, as "in these last days, He speaks to us in His Son." And this word is described as a "Gospel": those who proclaim it proclaim "glad tidings." Is that our idea of preaching and of hearing? Do we speak and do we listen, as if that which is being said were, as it ought to be, something not only true, not only important, but attractive and joyful, too?

For a short time now the attention is to be directed to a new actor.

"And Philip came down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ." This is not Philip the Apostle, but that Philip who (together with Stephen) was one of the seven men chosen in the 6th chapter to assist the Apostles in the daily distribution. At a later time he is described as "Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven." He "came down" from Jerusalem the capital "to a (not the) city of Samaria"; to some town, not named, in the region of Samaria; and there "began to proclaim to them," as with the voice of a herald, summoning men to the Christian race and the Christian prize—such is the force of the original expression—began to act as the herald to them, not of a mere doctrine or a historical fact, but of a Person; even of Him Whose coming was the one hope of the world, the Messiah or Christ, the anointed Prophet and Priest and King of Israel and of the world. That was his subject. He "preached Christ unto them."

And not without success. "And the multitudes," who formed the population of that city, "attended to the things spoken by Philip, with one accord, as they heard his words and saw the signs which he did." "Not in word only, but also in power and in demonstration of the Spirit," did Philip speak now, as Paul afterwards.

"For from many," the narrative proceeds, "who had unclean spirits, they (the evil spirits) crying with a loud voice (in token of reluctance and of compulsion) came out: and many paralysed and lame persons were healed." Thus God gave testimony in this new place to the Word of life. Persons tortured by the actual possession of evil spirits were delivered from them in virtue of that voice which used the all-availing name of Christ." "Sitting at the feet of their deliverer, "clothed and in their right mind," they became witnesses to all men of the presence of His grace before Whom the devils themselves tremble. And bodily cures also, in the form of deliverances from lameness and from paralysis accompanied the other; that the very senses of men might be able to attest the reality of the Divine working. "And there arose much joy in that city."

1. It is the will of God to propagate His Son's Gospel. It is His intention that it should spread; and in all ways, through circumstances adverse to it or

prosperous, He gives it free course. Sometimes it is by opening the commerce of nations, so that the messengers of salvation may occupy new fields, and (in a larger sense than before) "sow beside all waters." Sometimes it is by suffering a short-lived triumph to the enemies of the truth; so that some spark from a martyr's pile may kindle a fire, in a land or in a heart, which by God's grace shall never be put out. It has been thus in all times. And great as has been the effect of the protection and patronage of kings and queens as the nursing fathers and mothers of the Church below, we may boldly say that it has been as nothing, in the long run, in comparison with that "constancy of faith even unto death," of which all great epochs of the Church have furnished examples, even as the history of St. Stephen himself was its first and most memorable instance. "They who were dispersed abroad, in the persecution which arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the Word." And by degrees the story of his life and of his death became incorporated in the word which they preached; and men were emboldened by that great example to look up to Heaven in their own sufferings for the truth, and by faith to see that Heaven opened, and Jesus Himself standing at the right hand of God. This was all that remained of the effects of the first Christian persecution; an added testimony, a wider circulation, and a more decided devotion.

Though we are not called, in these quiet times, to give our bodies to be burned for the testimony of the truth, yet we are called, every one of us, to assist in propagating the Gospel, not only by such offerings of gold and silver as are from time to time asked of us in that behalf, but even more, by so living and so dying as that others may take knowledge of us that we believe that which we profess, and love that which we believe. "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us." It is His will to propagate His Son's Gospel, from land to land, and not less from heart to heart.

2. But what is the Gospel? It is described in two expressions.

(1) First it is called "the word." They "went everywhere preaching the word." What is a word? It is the utterance of a mind. It is the communication of something first conceived. It is the expression of thought, of intention, of purpose, of determination. In its simplest and most general definition it is reason communicating itself. Do we indeed believe that the Gospel is this? the expression of God's mind concerning us? the communication of His will, of His purpose, of His thought, so far as it affects us His human creation? It is a grand, a glorious view, which is thus opened. God has spoken; spoken concerning us, and spoken to us. That silence which has lasted from Creation is at length broken. That mystery which for ages and generations had enveloped the ulterior designs of the Almighty Creator touching His rebellious creatures is at last revealed, unveiled, disclosed, laid open. God has spoken; and what He has spoken is a Word. He has announced to us the forgiveness of sins through a Mediator and a Sacrifice. He has announced to us the sanctification of sinners, their recreation in His own lost image, by means of an indwelling Holy Spirit, Himself God and from God. He has announced to us that prayer, which is only speaking to Him in the heart, is the one connecting link between us and these two unspeakable gifts. And He has announced to us that it is His intention, when the fulness of the time shall come, to raise the dead and to change the living, so that the one and the other may be capable of an immortal existence, the character of which, for happiness or misery, will depend upon the mind here formed in us, and the life here led by us, as individual beings, capable of choice, and responsible for making it. These things are amongst the disclosures embodied in that Word, or message, or communi-

cation from God, which these dispersed disciples preached throughout Judæ and Samaria, and which we, if we be faithful to our commission, are preaching still and still hearing.

(2) But, as they preached "the Word," so Philip preached "Christ." He "went down to a city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." There was no contrariety, no difference, between the two Gospels. Christ is the Word. To preach *Christ*, in His person, in His character, in His work; in His example and in His atonement, and in His Priesthood; in His two comings, and in His three comings; His coming to bear the sin of the world, His coming by the Spirit to the individual soul, and His coming in glorious majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and finally to establish His Kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy; this is to proclaim God's *Word* also, in its simplicity, in its fulness, and in its strength.

3. And now, thirdly, as to the credentials of this Gospel: how is it proved?

When Philip preached in a city of Samaria certain results followed: evil spirits came out of many, palsied limbs regained strength, and "the lame man" (in the language of ancient prophecy) "leaped as an hart." Thus he could appeal to effects, and say, Judge ye whether a doctrine which brings with it these infallible signs be indeed of man or of God. We are in one sense less fortunate. These visible tokens do not now attend our preaching. Not, as we hope, from any fault in the message or (necessarily) in the messenger, but of God's all-wise will, are these demonstrations of His power now withheld. We ought not to want them: and "if we hear not Moses and the prophets," if we refuse the holy doctrine of Christ and the Apostles, neither should we be influenced by any outward sign; "neither should we be persuaded though one rose from the dead." These are not the signs for which we look and would pray in our hearers. But a changed life, an altered spirit; the leaving off of known sins, the correction of evil tempers, the eradication of hurtful lusts; the formation of Christian habits, and the diligent use of Christ's ordinances; the table of devils deserted, and the Table of the Lord frequented by humble and thronging worshippers; these are the true proofs of the Gospel Word in our days; by these things other men take knowledge of its power and of its virtue; in them do unbelieving men read the sure record of their condemnation, and the trembling fearful conscience the assurance of a free forgiveness for all who will "enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."

4. Finally, the text tells us what ought to be the effect of the proclamation, in any place, of the true and lively Word. "There was great joy in that city." Joy is a very strong word. It is the overflowing of happiness. It is the exuberance, the redundancy, the efflorescence, of a comfort and a tranquillity habitually felt within. O where is Christian joy in these hearts of ours? such joy as that of which St. Paul wrote, when he said, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice"? or St. John, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full"? or our Lord Himself, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"? Levity there may be, and too much of it; wit pungent or boisterous, sporting sometimes even with holy things; cheerful spirits in some, domestic happiness in some, contentment and even thankfulness in a few: but where amongst us is that grace of Christian joy which seemed to flow so naturally, in other days, out of the very first reception of the tidings of a Saviour? Let us pray, as for the first elements and rudiments of a true Christian faith, so also for its development in us, and for its perfection; its perfection in a sober, a chastened, yet an abiding joy; in a happiness not only felt within, but expressed in every look and in every step and in every word without.

Simon Magus

BY REV. JOHN FAWCETT, M.A.

"But there was a certain man, called Simon," &c.—Acts viii. 9-17.

A new and awful character is here introduced, a man who had used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria. Little is known of this man beyond what is recorded in the chapter before us. It is not certain whether he was a Samaritan or a Jew; but he is said to have studied philosophy at Alexandria, and to have made a public profession of magic. Such was Simon, who, taking up his abode in Samaria, there practised his infernal arts. Infernal we may well call them, for his sorcery seems to have been real, not pretended. The history which we are considering gives other undoubted instances of actual commerce with evil spirits; and it was through such assistance that Simon bewitched the people of Samaria with his sorceries. He gave out that he was some great one; and caused all, from the least to the greatest, to give heed to him, saying, "This man is the great power of God."

We may well suppose that there was not a more dangerous enemy to the faith which our Lord's own preaching had produced than this sorcerer. Simon and Jesus could not be had in honour at the same time. There could be no communion between Christ and Belial; Christ and an evil spirit could not agree together to share between them the homage of the same worshippers: in proportion as Simon was honoured Jesus must decline. It might seem then at first sight as if Satan in this case had been stronger than Christ, and cast Him out. And so for a time appearances have ever been—wickedness seems to be triumphant, the god of this world to prevail; the strong man armed keepeth his palace, and his goods are at peace. So he did in Samaria; and Simon was a fit instrument to uphold his usurped power. The lying wonders of this man would tend mightily to strengthen the kingdom of darkness, and to rivet the chains of error on the deluded people.

Such was the state of Samaria when Philip visited it, a light had been kindled by the preaching of Jesus, and an emissary of darkness was labouring to extinguish it, and with no small success. But when Philip preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, then the truth showed itself mighty and prevailed. As many as had remained steadfast in the faith of Christ, we may conceive, would be confirmed therein; and those who had been seduced would be recovered from their error, and when they saw miracles and signs done in the name of Christ, would remember Him Whom they had before acknowledged to be the Saviour of the world. The fact was that they believed upon the preaching of Philip, and were baptised, both men and women. And in this stage of proceedings a most wonderful circumstance took place. Simon himself, the devil's agent, the grand pillar of the kingdom of darkness, was convinced of the superior power which resided in Philip. As the rod of Aaron, when changed into a serpent, swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians, when in like manner changed; so the miracles done by Philip eclipsed the miracles wrought by Simon, and not only caused the Samaritans to believe, but compelled Simon himself to believe also. Not indeed, as appears afterwards, with a faith which was to be saving of the soul; but with such a faith as even Philip could not see to be false and hypocritical. Appearances were so good that he was admitted to baptism; and Simon the sorcerer was for a time numbered among the worshippers of Christ.

We may observe here that the case of this unhappy man serves to illustrate the character of the Gospel as a dispensation of rich mercy, in which where sin had abounded grace did much more abound : for we can hardly conceive a greater degree of wickedness than that in which Simon had been engaged. The proud self-exaltation, the setting himself up as some great one ; the aiming at being looked upon as the great power of God, and the supporting of these pretensions by magic arts through the aid of evil spirits, forms such an aggregate of wickedness as we can hardly think of without horror. Yet when Philip supposed him to be believing in Christ, no mention is made of any one of these things. He is accepted as what he seemed to have become, without any remembrance of what he once was ; and admitted by baptism into the Christian Church, so that had he really been what he seemed to be, a true penitent, a true believer, he would not only have been admitted into the Church on earth, but received also into the Church in Heaven.

We must not, however, misunderstand the case of this man. Though he had not saving faith, the faith which he seemed to have was not mere pretence, not altogether feigned. He was not acting a part, and joining the disciples of Christ, while in his heart he believed them to be in error. No : we are told that he believed. He had a sort of conviction that Jesus was the Christ, and that Philip was His servant, and he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now while he continued with Philip he must have kept up some appearance of religion ; he must have joined in holy exercises, and so have conducted himself as to have been taken by Philip for a pious man. In all this there most probably was a mixture of principles—a measure of real feeling, and a measure of hypocritical pretence. If all had been hypocritical, the mask could hardly have been worn so artfully but that Philip must have seen through it : and that all was sincere, his character, as it was afterwards discovered, forbids us to suppose.

Something of real feeling in religion, helped out by a good deal of pretence, is no uncommon thing, when persons—who nevertheless do not think themselves hypocrites—wish in religious company to appear more religious than they are. And such I take it was actually the case with Simon, and the cause why he continued with Philip unsuspected, at least not exposed. But the news of Philip's preaching and of his success reached Jerusalem. The Apostles who were there heard that Samaria had received the word of God ; and unwilling that Philip should labour alone, without assistance or encouragement in so plenteous a field, they sent to him Peter and John to strengthen his hands in the work, and also to supply some branches of service to which he, as an inferior teacher, was not competent.

Accordingly, when the two Apostles arrived at Samaria, they found that though the preaching of Philip had been highly successful, and there were many converts, yet none of them had received the Holy Ghost. It did not seem to be the will of God that this miraculous gift should be bestowed except by means of the Apostles themselves. We may be sure that the converts, as many as were sincere, were already partakers of the Holy Ghost in the best sense of the words. They had professed the faith of Christ, and in consequence of that profession had been baptised in His name. Now this faith itself, if genuine, was the work of the Holy Ghost. It was of a holy nature, a holy root, a good tree which would bring forth good fruits. But over and above this there is indisputable evidence that in the first age of the Church there were certain miraculous gifts conferred by the Apostles, and by the Apostles alone. Of these gifts we know nothing but what we are told in the Acts of the Apostles,

and in the Epistles, especially of St. Paul ; and there we find something distinctly related, others left in doubt. We learn, for instance, that the gifts were of different kinds, but that the most common was the gift of speaking with tongues. We learn, too, that the mode in which these gifts were conferred was by the laying on of hands and prayer. But we do not know whether these gifts were conferred on all the baptised or not ; or, if on all whether those who were endowed with the gift could at all times exercise it, or only at particular seasons.

Leaving, therefore, these doubtful points, I would only observe that supposing a selection to be made, there is no reason to think—indeed it is highly improbable—that the gift would be conferred only on the pious and not on the hypocrites also. It is not at all likely that the Lord would thus set a visible mark on His people by which at once they might be known of all men, not by their holy fruits but by an outward sign. It is not likely that He would thus separate the tares from the wheat before the time, instead of suffering both to grow together till the harvest. The probability is that good and bad, saints and hypocrites, had these gifts in common. Simon was as likely to have them as any other person. If they were bestowed on all, he must have had them ; if only on some, he might. And supposing this to be the case, we have the remarkable, and not at all improbable fact that he who once exercised a supernatural power by the help of the devil, now exercised a supernatural power by the help of the Holy Ghost.

Let our first practical observation then from this subject be : The comparative worthlessness of gifts, and the superior excellency of holy graces.

Both proceed from the Spirit of God, and both are good ; but the one beyond compare surpasses the other. Gifts are good. It was a great thing, for instance, to be able to speak with tongues. The possessor of such a gift might by means of it do much service to the cause of Christ, and greatly promote the salvation of men. It was a faculty not in any high degree profitable to the individual himself, but by which he might profit others. When exercised on proper occasions it might be the means of convincing unbelievers : therefore Paul says—“ Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” Like riches, or health, or learning, or eloquence, it was a talent committed to the possessor for the use of which he would be liable to give an account. Like them it was capable of being faithfully used or of being abused ; and when abused it proved like them a snare to the possessor, and involved him in guilt. So it proved to the Corinthians. They abused their power of speaking with tongues to the purposes of vain glory, and incurred thereby the reproof of the Apostle Paul. Spiritual gifts, like the advantages of wealth, learning, or eloquence, were also temporary things. They differed from these things only in the one point of being supernatural ; in other respects they were the same, transient, and good or evil, according as they were either rightly used or sinfully perverted.

It is not so with holy graces. There is in all, even in the least and lowest of them, something of a divine and heavenly character. It may be little in its measure, weak in its actings, and scarcely perceived in its effects, but in its nature it is inestimably precious. One feeling of real humiliation for sin, one emotion of godly sorrow, bespeaks a heart turned to the love of goodness, and beginning at least to delight in the law of God ; and when the same feeling grows stronger, and becomes a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a self-aborrence on account of the remains of sin still dwelling in the heart, a forgetting of the things that are behind, a reaching forth to those that are before ; when grace works powerfully, the happy subject of it cannot endure that anything of deceit, or pride, or impurity, or malice, should abide in his breast ; he would have all to be truth and humility, and purity and love. And in whatever degree

these graces are found, it must be remembered that they are immortal. They do not like gifts perish in the using, and expire with this present life ; but survive the stroke of death, and go on and flourish in eternity. On earth they are at best imperfect and mixed with much evil ; but in Heaven they shall be perfected and freed from every taint of corruption.

Then there is this difference—those supernatural gifts were but signs to unbelievers on the first establishment of the Gospel, these holy graces are of the very substance of Christianity itself, a part of the salvation intended for all ages of the Church, and formed in all the members of it. Yes, brethren, there lies before every one of us one of the noblest objects that can be proposed to our ambition—and an object that is really attainable—to be made truly holy, and to be making a perpetual progress in holiness. Oh ! if half the time and labour, and thought and contrivance, which are employed in the pursuit of riches were devoted to the search of this best and noblest treasure, we should, without fail, be enriched with it : for here the faithful and diligent pursuit is never without success. The promise, “ Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find,” is always fulfilled to those who ask and seek the truth. To all who ask Him the Father will give the Holy Spirit : the Source and Author of all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.

And as the grace of the Gospel is powerful enough to elevate a man to any height, so it is condescending enough to stoop for him to any depth. A man cannot be sunk in so deep a gulf of sin and misery that his case should be desperate. Oh, no ! However far he may have wandered from his Father's house, to whatever straits he may be reduced, if he comes to himself, if he considers his ways, if he turns a longing eye to the blessings of that happy home and ventures to think of returning, ventures to indulge the hope of being received, and under the influence of that hope says, “ I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee,” his treatment will be that of the prodigal as set forth in the beautiful parable recorded by St. Luke. His Heavenly Father will see afar off the first relents of his altered soul ; will run, as it were, to meet him, will fall on his neck and welcome with joy and with tokens of affections his returning child. Let every sinner repent ; but let no sinner despair. Let everyone be humbled ; but none discouraged. The Gospel is a salvation for sinners ; Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Can any of you be sunk in a deeper abyss of guilt than Simon the sorcerer had been ? yet if his professed faith had been a true faith, if he had been a penitent instead of a hypocrite, all that sin would have been forgiven, and he who had held intercourse with the spirits of hell would have been made an heir of Heaven.

Again, therefore, I say, let not any sinner despair on account of the greatness of his past sins, be they ever so great or ever so many, the blood of Christ can wash them all away, and redeem him from all his iniquities. It is evident that the faith with which this entire forgiveness, this complete justification, is connected, must be an unfeigned faith. Christ will give the blessing to all who call upon Him in truth, but not to those who call upon Him hypocritically. And He Who knows the heart knows in every instance whether the faith professed be the faith of the heart, or only the confession of the mouth. The latter, the confession of the mouth, must suffice for man, unless it be belied by some manifest inconsistency : because man can look only on the outward appearance, he cannot see the heart. Even Philip, who, as being supernaturally gifted to work miracles and signs, may be supposed to have had a more than ordinary skill in the discerning of spirits, was deceived in Simon. He admitted to baptism

the man who had been notorious as a sorcerer and impostor ; allowed him to mix with the disciples, and to share in their religious exercises. Now this countenance from Philip would tend to lull suspicion in the minds of others. If any, before whom he was less on his guard, had their doubts about his character, still when they saw their teacher acknowledge him, they would naturally judge themselves mistaken. Nay, this support of Philip might even help Simon to deceive himself. If he had some religious feelings, if he not only wondered at the miracles done by Philip, but also at times heard his word with joy, he might almost persuade himself that he was a Christian indeed. And thus it is that ministers, while they form a charitable judgment on a credible profession, may give currency to unsound characters ; and what is worse still, may help such characters to think themselves to be something, when they are nothing. O let no man flatter himself in his own eyes because of the favourable opinion of others, the favourable opinion even of experienced ministers. The most experienced minister sees not the heart, and may therefore easily be deceived.

Let every man, therefore, judge himself and "prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another" : for "every man must bear his own burden." O what will it avail any of you to be thought well of by ministers now, if you must be exposed in your true colours before the Angels of God in that day ? However well your tongue may speak, and however good a confession you may witness before ministers, there may be that in your heart which ministers cannot see, but which Christ sees, and which in His sight makes all your profession worthless. If there be any secret reserves ; if any sin be spared, any evil temper indulged ; if you have two faces, a religious face before religious people, and a worldly face before worldly people, you may carry on all well for a time—and perhaps it may be but for a time—your folly may be made manifest even here like that of Simon, but if not here, it will be hereafter when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and every man receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether good or bad. Cease then from man and bend all the powers of your souls to be approved of Him Who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins ; and unto Whose eyes all things are naked and open. Cultivate the religion of the heart. Seek to have the heart purified by faith, and filled with love. Learn to love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth ; so shall you know that you are of the truth, and shall assure your hearts before Him.

The Apostles' Visit to Samaria.

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard," &c.—Acts viii. 14-24

The Apostles, who, as we have seen, wisely remained at Jerusalem, as a centre and rallying-point for the dispersed Christians, deputed two of their body to visit Samaria, and give the Apostolic sanction to the great work which was going on there. The two deputies were the foremost men of the whole college—St. Peter and St. John. As regards St. Peter, his official presence was probably required by the position which he held in Prophecy and in the Providence of God. His Lord had entrusted him with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, indicating that he was to throw open the gates of the Gospel Dispensation to all men, first to the Jews, which he did on the Day of Pentecost, and then to the Gentiles, which he did by the admission of Cornelius and his party to the

Church. But standing midway between Jews and Gentiles there was another sect of religionists, the Samaritans, more abhorred by the Jews than even the Gentiles themselves. The inveteracy of Jewish prejudices against this sect needed to be overcome in the minds of the Jewish Christians; and there was no better way of overcoming it than by St. Peter's taking a journey to confirm the faith of the Samaritan converts, and to admit them, by imposition of hands, to the fullest privileges of Church membership. Here we see him, in fulfilment of his Lord's word, wielding the keys and throwing open the gate of the new Economy to the Samaritans, as he had previously done to the Jews, and was to do subsequently to the Gentiles.

St. John is constantly associated with him in the early chapters of the Acts, and it is not therefore surprising that St. John should have accompanied him on this occasion. But it is certainly a striking coincidence, if it be nothing more than that one of the two Apostles who, in our Lord's lifetime, had given vent to the prevailing feeling of hostility against Samaritans, and had suggested that fire should be called down from Heaven upon the inhabitants of a Samaritan village, should have been selected, now that a better and more loving spirit had taken possession of his heart, to call down upon the Samaritans the fire, not of judgment, but of God's illuminating and enkindling grace. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost had made new men of the Apostles, and of John among the rest: had softened his asperities, had enlarged his sympathies, and had made him willing to invoke a blessing where he had once longed to invoke a judgment.

The act of the Apostles at Samaria forms the Scriptural ground for the rite of Confirmation. The outward shape which this Ordinance now wears among ourselves has been given to it by the Church, and has been determined no doubt by modern needs; but the germ of the Ordinance is in the passage before us. For we find here an invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the baptised, accompanied by imposition of hands, both invocation and imposition performed by the rulers of the Church, who are called in for the purpose, and evidently incapable of being performed (in this particular case) by others. It is often alleged that this imposition of hands was merely for the bestowal of miraculous gifts, such as now have ceased in the Church; but that these gifts were accompanied with an increase of grace is clear from the first instance of their bestowal at Pentecost. It will not be denied that after Pentecost the Apostles were filled with a zeal, a courage, and a spiritual insight to which they were previously strangers. And we are therefore led to believe that these moral and spiritual effects uniformly followed all similar outpourings of the Holy Spirit. And as such moral and spiritual effects are unquestionably wrought upon the heart now-a-days, we do not think it meet to discontinue the outward sign with which in primitive times they were connected. And, moreover, as Baptism is in the nature of a contract, into which Christ enters with the soul, and the practice of *Infant* Baptism makes it almost a necessity to have some period at which a baptised child may consciously and of his own accord enter into this contract, it seems extremely suitable (to say the least of it) that when our children have come to such an age that they can make a stipulation for themselves, they should then receive the completion of Baptism, and the fulness of baptismal grace by prayer and the imposition of hands. This imposition of hands, the same outward sign which is employed in Ordination, consecrates, as it were, the baptised person to the royal priesthood, which is the common prerogative of Christians, that he may offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through

Jesus Christ It sets him apart solemnly, whatever be his secular pursuit, for the service of Christ and for the glory of God.

Once before had money been offered to St. Peter, in order to gain a fair reputation among men. Ananias had laid down at Peter's feet part of the price of his property, wishing to have it understood as the whole. Simon Magus now lays money down at his feet (for the word translated "offered," means offering in action he did not only propose upon certain terms to bring it, but actually brought it), in order to win, not merely a fair character, but power and influence. He had watched with great interest the miraculous effects which followed the laying on of the Apostles' hands, the casting out of devils, the speaking with new tongues, the healing powers which descended upon the new converts. This was just the secret he wanted in order to regain his lost influence over the minds of the simple-hearted Samaritans; the possession of the Apostles' power would enable him to eclipse Philip, who could only do miracles, not enable others to do them. He longed to be put in communication with the source of this power, which no doubt he regarded as magical rather than moral. It would be money well spent, he thought, if he could not only enchant people himself, but gain the secret of qualifying others to enchant them. So he brought a considerable portion of the gains of his trade, and pouring out the gold and silver before the Apostles he said, "Give me also this power." It is to be remarked as a feature of the case that what Simon coveted was not the Holy Spirit, but the power of communicating the Spirit to others. And all that he cared to communicate to others was not the grace of the Spirit, but His gifts; not any moral or spiritual influence which might reach the consciences and touch the hearts of men, but the power of working miracles, which he had seen Philip exercise. And there can be little doubt that what he offered money *for* he intended to win money *by*. If the Apostles would but communicate to him their secret he thought he could make a lucrative trade of it. There is no trace in him, throughout the whole transaction, of anything but the coarsest earthliness of mind, an immersion in secular interests, and a devotion to secular self. So that St. Peter's cutting reproof, and his insinuation of the difficulty of saving a character so far gone in evil, does not seem at all too strong for the occasion. Had there been a single stirring of conscience in Simon, a single aspiration after goodness, or even the faintest shadow of a desire for spiritual blessing, the rejoinder, while still it might have been in the tone of censure, would have been far more lenient. But the Lord had, in the hearing of His Apostles, spoken of a sin against the Holy Ghost, which He solemnly declared to be unpardonable here and hereafter. It was the sin which the Pharisees committed in attributing His beneficent miracles to Satan. The miracles were done by the power of the Holy Ghost (which God gave without measure unto His Son), and were of such a character that, when taken in combination with the doctrine of Christ, they could leave no doubt on any candid mind of our Lord's Divine mission. Those therefore, who sinned in full view of such miracles sinned against the Holy Ghost. And it seems to me that, when St. Peter is administering this reproof, the thought is working in his mind that Simon possibly had committed a sin of the same malignant kind, he having witnessed the Holy Ghost's miraculous attestations of the Gospel, but giving no trace whatever of conversion of heart under such evidence, and that hence the tone of uncertainty which the Apostle adopts when speaking of Simon's forgiveness—"Pray God, *if perhaps* the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

However this may be, certainly the contrasts of character in the Church of Christ are in this passage of Scripture most forcibly drawn out. Here is Simon the Apostle, a man of the most intense disinterestedness, who had forsaken all to follow his Master, confronted with Simon the Sorcerer, who had nominally embraced Christianity, as discerning in it a secret which may throw power and wealth into his hands. What a natural repulsion must there be between the minds of these men, when one gets an inkling for the moment of the character of the other! How do they illustrate the inspired similitudes of the wheat and the tares in the same field, the chaff and the grain on the same floor, the good fish and the bad in the same net, the sheep and the goats in the same fold.

The Apostle had exhorted Simon to fall on his knees and beg mercy for himself. Simon, instead of at once complying, intimates that he prefers praying by deputy; "Pray *ye* to the Lord for me," an emphasis being placed on the "*ye*." How fair-seeming, and yet how false at bottom! What a show of humility, and yet what an evident hypocrisy! Prayer for oneself implies some reality of spiritual desire. Where no such desire exists the soul repudiates prayer as that which would bring it into an uncomfortably close neighbourhood to God. Yet it would have those evils averted, which prayer may avert. So it gladly shifts the burden of prayer to a go-between, to anyone whose virtues, or whose official position, seem to place him in immediate communication with Heaven. But there is no grace where the heart is not prompted to pray for itself. Again, observe the point to which he wishes the Apostle's prayer to be directed. It is not, "Pray for me that I may be converted; that true repentance may be given me; that I may receive the influences of God's Spirit; that I may no longer deceive myself"; but, "Pray for me that your threats may never be realised, that *none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*" Where the mind of a sinner is solicitous for nothing more than deliverance from the consequences of sin, there is no trace of genuine repentance. The devils, we are told, tremble; there is in their minds (as appears from some of the petitions which they addressed to our Lord) a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour Gods adversaries. But there is no loathing of sin, as abominable in its own nature; no perception of its intrinsic grievousness; no longing to lay down the burden of corrupt desires. These things come only of grace.

I. The bringing secular motives into sacred functions, or into the administration of sacred things, is a sin of similar complexion with Simon's, and may be committed several ways. The minister of God's Word, when he seeks popularity and applause rather than the edification of souls in his ministration; when the motive for his diligence is place and preferment, rather than a simple desire to acquit himself of the great responsibilities undertaken at Ordination; the candidate for the sacred ministry, who seeks Holy Orders as a means of comfortable subsistence, and prays to be put in one of the priest's offices, that he may eat a piece of bread; the layman who, having the disposal of ecclesiastical benefices and cures of souls, bestows them in any shape for his own advantage, rather than as he conceives to be the best for the spiritual interests of the flock of Christ; and, in a lower degree, all who without a spark of earnestness take part in God's Worship, with the view rather of maintaining a character than of seeking a blessing—all these manifest in different shapes and lower grades something of the spirit of him, who made the first great proposal in the history of the Church to procure for money, and to exercise for popularity and gain, the powers of an Apostle.

II. But if we view this sin of Simon's in its root and principle, we shall find it to reach to many other cases besides those referred to. St. Peter places his finger upon the black spot in Simon's heart—he detects the radical fault when he says, “Because thou thoughtest to purchase the free gift of God *with money*.” There is a hard and coarse worldliness, common at all times, but more especially common when civilisation is much advanced, and material resources much developed, whose characteristic sentiment is that anything and everything is to be had for money. The falseness of such a sentiment is of course transparent. Money obviously cannot purchase anything which enters even into the lower life of man. It cannot purchase beauty, it cannot purchase talent for its possessor, though it may put these things at his command. It cannot purchase health, it cannot procure an hour's extension of our span of life. Comeliness, talent, health, life are God's free gifts, and He distributes them as He listeth, without money and without price. Of course it is not *theoretically maintained*, even by the veriest worldling, that these things are procurable for money, much less that higher blessings are so procurable. But what is not theoretically maintained is often practically and virtually asserted. Men do not dispute for it as a controversial thesis; but they live, they act, they conduct themselves as if it were true. And how many thousands are there who live and act as if it were true that money could procure happiness, peace of mind, contentment and satisfaction of the heart! How many thousands are there who place their happiness in external circumstances, and, because money can unquestionably command advantageous circumstances, feel therefore that it is the one great secret of happiness! But that love to God and man, which is the true contentment of the soul, that joy in the hope of glory which follows upon faith in Christ, that peace of conscience which flows to us through His atoning Wounds, can no more be purchased by thousands of gold and silver than the first burst of the morning, with its fresh rustling breeze and its twitter of birds, can be so purchased. The spring of true joy in the heart is God's gift: it is in the character, not in the circumstances, of man; and he whose circumstances are the most prosperous may know the least of it, may have, in the midst of affluence and luxury, a heart corroded with care and disquieted with apprehensions. Wherefore, “take heed and beware of covetousness”—of that subtle trust in the power of the good things of this world to communicate happiness, which, in an age when civilisation makes life easy and multiplies its conveniences, is ever so ready to insinuate itself into the heart.

III. One thought more our passage suggests, even if to apply it so be rather to accommodate it than to draw out its obvious lessons. “Thou thoughtest that *the free gift of God* may be purchased with money.”

The highest of all God's free gifts is acquittal, justification, or, in other words, righteousness. It is offered to us in the Gospel as the result, not of human endeavour or human merit, but of Christ's finished, perfect, and glorious work. But how many are there who vainly think that it may be purchased with money, not indeed with the gold that perisheth, but with the spiritual currency of prayers, fastings, alms-deeds, good works—how many who cling pertinaciously to the idea that they must pay down something to God in the shape of effort, before they can hope to win acceptance with Him, not perceiving that acceptance has already been won for us by the Blood and Righteousness of Christ, and not weighing that grave query of St. Paul, “Who hath first given to the Lord, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” No! God gives us freely His Son, and in Him acceptance, pardon, righteousness, and strength, before He condescends to accept anything from us. He will be known by us as Sovereign

Donor, not as any man's debtor. True it is that there is a recompense of Grace, but it comes after, and as the result of, acceptance. It is not the procuring cause, it is but the effect of mercy—mercy shown in the first instance without a single merit, except Christ's Merit, and without a single plea, except His Blood.

Gift and Purchase

BY REV. ARTHUR BROOKS, D.D.

"Thy money perish with thee," &c.—Acts viii. 20.

See how general in its term is Peter's charge. It is not that Simon wanted a position in the rising Church; he does not specify the fact that he desired to purchase the power of calling down the Holy Ghost. Those features are lost sight of in the larger charge, that he thought to purchase a gift from God.

We to-day, in the enlargement of life which Christianity has produced, look on many things as the gift of God. The desires of men do not turn, as they did once, to Church positions or ministerial functions. If they did there would not be the constant lament over the deficiency in the supply of young men who are offering themselves for God's work as ministers in His Church. Other paths of life are ever opening as means of blessing to the world; other positions are sought as conveying influence and power. With this enlarged range of desire, the sin of Simon becomes also enlarged beyond what it was in the Middle Ages, when places in the Church were so valuable. Wherever money is looked upon as the means of obtaining any of God's gifts, wherever to it is ascribed a power to compel God, directly or indirectly, there simony will exist. Surely, then, in a time when the power of money is dwelt upon as it never was before, when, by the possibilities of control and combination which it displays, it sometimes attracts and again frightens us, when it is alternately fascinating and everwhelming—surely such a time is the very one when more than ever we need to understand the curse upon its misuse which Peter uttered long ago. These are not the times which can spare this verse for any dead historical issue.

As we read over Peter's words, their very sound brings out the nature of the sin, for their terms express the contradiction that is involved in all misuse of money. To purchase a gift is evidently impossible. One of the two words must be wrong. Either the thing is not a gift, or else we have not purchased it. Is the world, is our life, a gift, or is it a purchase? Between those two ideas we are for ever vacillating. Our belief in God says that it is a gift: our lives of activity and energy say it is a purchase. We talk of providence, and then are discouraged at our misfortunes or our failures, as if we had never heard of such a thing as God's providence. We pray for all blessings, temporal and spiritual, and then congratulate ourselves when we have put ourselves into a position to obtain them.

Now, into these lives, for ever tossed between these two ideas, enters the element of money. Its one reason of existence is purchase. We cannot eat it and cannot wear it; the man who hoards it for the mere pleasure of looking at it is acknowledged to be a pitiable fool. Can we not see how at once this universal thing, so necessary and so much desired, throws all its weight on the side of purchase in our view of life? It makes it one continual barter. From hand to hand the precious possession passes; it is never out of sight long; it sings its monotonous song of purchase in every place. What wonder that it

soon seems to tell the whole story of life, and to sum up all our relations as men. See how the man without money begins to look on life entirely from the other side, of gift. He rings at your door, and, with his face hardened to asking, tells you that you ought to help him. He reads you a lecture on your charity and your modes of giving: it is a subject with which he is well acquainted. He lives in order to receive gifts; the world owes him a living, why should he purchase it with his work? The same man, suddenly made rich, often knows not how to use his money; either by lavishness or by squandering he wastes it, because by long disuse all the laws of careful purchase as the basis of human action have become obsolete in his mind.

Purchase is a necessary element of life, and money represents it. It is needed for our independence; without it we sink down into gift-receivers from our fellow-men. The strong, self-reliant character that belongs to men of business comes entirely from their holding so natural a relation to their fellow-men: they receive what they pay for, they expect to be paid for what they give. That is the simple law of honest trade, and it is the law of honest manhood, and woe to the man who attempts to avoid it, whether it be by begging or by gambling. The very money which he receives is a rebuke to him, as it tells him of the universal existence of that law of purchase between man and man, which, like all other laws, will punish the man who violates it. Money is man's contrivance for his purposes, for convenience in obeying the law of his human connection. The very stamp on it says, "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's."

But when money, with the principle which it represents, begins to enter into our relation to God, then the contradiction comes, and the sin with it. Just as living on men's gifts spoils our true relation to them, so trying to purchase of God spoils entirely the true sense of our relation to Him. God must give: that fact is written in our belief of Him as our Creator, our great Superior, infinitely above us. It is the fact that is repeated in the tone of authority that fills every revelation of Him; it is the thought of every heart that cares to look for Him in the earth around us. There is no God if we can purchase things of Him. Money is utterly atheistic in its very central principle when it is taken out of its proper place; and, as men heap it up, we have only the repetition of the old-storied struggle of the giants who heaped mountain upon mountain, all of which were so good in their places on earth, that they might reach to Heaven, and unseat God from His Throne. As money grows in power and influence this will be its destructive power upon men's lives. You need not wait for the debased indulgence that comes with acquired luxury: the danger is in the first dollar that is earned. Beware of it; it meets all men—yes, and women, too—as they pass out of childhood's state of gift-receiving into manhood's time of purchase. There is nothing with which to meet it but the simple knowledge of God cultivated by every means which is thrown about us, and by every spiritual influence which can be brought to bear upon us. The relation to God must be learned more and more closely in all its special features. The thought and the effort must be fixed directly on Him by morals, by religion, by worship, by study, by prayer. No new view of relations to men can take its place, for it is just those which the fact of money is for ever exaggerating and distorting.

Which of God's gifts did money ever purchase? I need not repeat the common-places as to men's disappointments in the possession of wealth, for surely we know that on that never yet hinged the life, the health, the happiness, or the success of a man. We have all learned that, as money removes one set of dangers from life, it immediately creates others: as it allows greater attention to sanitary conditions, it also conduces to luxury and over-indulgence; as it makes inter-

course between men easier, it makes it more selfish and frivolous ; as it adds the means of success, it reduces the motive for struggle. What is the meaning of this ? Is it not that money can purchase human conditions, can do its work in its own sphere : it cannot do it beyond that sphere : it cannot purchase God's gifts. It is the voice of experience echoing that of religion, " In the beginning God created the heaven and earth " ; and " All souls are Mine," says God : " The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

And this is a truth which not only those who possess money, but all men, must learn. Peter's condemnation is of those who *think* that the gift of God can be purchased with money. He who stands at a greater or less distance from wealth, envying those who have it, feeling as if they had everything that is good, never recognising the clear limits of the power of purchase in life, but, by longing and struggle, fixing his mind on what is constantly hiding all true relation to God, he is in as much danger as the man who, with money in possession, is acting on its atheistic character in all his defiance of God and His laws. It is the poor in spirit who are blessed, and not the poor in purse. It is the man who believes in God as his infinite Benefactor, from Whom *gifts* alone can come, whether or not he has in possession that which enables him to purchase from his fellow-man—it is he, and he alone, that is blessed.

Never more than in these times, when money is the world's great power, never did all mankind more need the simplest, purest, most childlike belief in God, that life may be truly complete on both sides, toward man and toward God. The two sides will not remain without effect upon each other. The dependence of the one will soften and save from cruelty and haughtiness the independence of the other. He who knows that he is constantly receiving from One above him cannot be cruel and exacting toward one below him ; nay, he cannot keep from being like his great, bountiful God in sweet acts of charity. The independence of the one will add a sense of responsibility and power to the other ; he who appreciates the power that God has given him among his fellow-men will more gladly enter the service of that God to Whom he owes so much, thankful for the opportunity to do something. The contradiction between the two sides of life is ours. He who rightly knows his God can hold them both in perfect unity. We can know why it is hard for those who *trust* in riches, whether they possess them or not, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. With man it is impossible : with God all things are possible.

But is there not another higher view which men take of money, and which saves it somewhat from its atheistic aspect ? We hear men describe it as God's gift, and say that they are in search of it that they may do good with it. Many a man has started with just such a high intention in his labour of life. But what is the matter with such men ? Why is it that so often, as the money comes, the high purpose goes, and at last the man seems satisfied with possessing what he still calls God's gift, and what once he so fondly pictured he would use for God ? Is it not another witness to the truth of Peter's words of condemnation, that gift and purchase cannot be combined ? The man started with the idea of money as God's gift, but there his thought of God as a Giver stopped. The other blessings of God he would purchase with that one : he would get comfort and an easy conscience by the circumstances of life that made it unnecessary to sin, and easy to be respectable ; he would purchase religious blessings by gifts to God's treasury. He acknowledged God as a Giver when He made this world rich and powerful at creation, when He made him with the ability to get wealth, when He gave him the circumstances or the opportunities to acquire and to make it ; but God as a present Giver, One from Whose love and free

grace alone all that is desirable can come—that view of Him was crowded out of sight. And so gradually that one gift assumed all power to itself; the very way in which it assumed for itself the religious sanction, made it more powerful when once it was admitted as the object of life's search. In the man's theory there was no other gift, because money purchased everything; and so, sooner or later, the man's practice showed the same defect.

If the other view of money made it appear as atheistic, this one, although it has a theistic tone, is utterly anti-Christian. For the one central fact of Christ and His teaching is that God is always blessing men. He is with them constantly, and wants to be acknowledged, not only as Creator, but as ever-present Father. The gift of Christ, a new gift coming direct from Heaven, gives the key to all of our right understanding of God. Money is one of many gifts; it can purchase none of the others: thy money perish with thee, if thou thinkest that the gift of God can be purchased with money. It may turn in every direction, but it cannot get out of its own sphere. There must be no mercenary giving, to quiet conscience, to buy the way into Heaven, to obtain the right to be more eager about getting money. Those things must come direct from God's hand. You cannot buy them, no matter how earnestly you claim that money is God's gift. You must look right to Him for an easy conscience by knowledge of His love, His forgiveness, His guiding graces; you must get Heaven by loving and serving Him to Whom Heaven belongs, and Who constitutes its joys; you must obtain Church privileges by devotion to Him Who founded the Church, and shed His blood for it; you must gain earnestness and zeal in life by the presence and inspiration of that Holy Spirit Who shall guide it, keep it from sin, and make it truly successful. Then, giving and the use of money will be free from selfishness, if the thought of God's constant shower of blessings is vivid by the knowledge of Christ revealing to us the Father's love.

Simon Magus

BY REV. AUBREY L. MOORE, M.A.

"Thy money perish with thee," &c.—Acts viii. 20.

Peter and John had gone down to Samaria to confirm those who had been baptised by Philip the Deacon. The rite of Confirmation was the complement of Baptism, and could be ministered only by the highest order in the hierarchy. It was in those days accompanied by visible signs of divine power, which testified to the reality of the grace conferred. The sorcerer was amazed at this. It was to him a new kind of magic of which he had not yet the secret. He had taught the people that he was "some great one," but now he stood in the presence of those who were greater than he. His position was at stake. He must, at all costs, learn the new art. So he offered the Apostles money that he might share the Apostolic power, and become a steward of the mysteries of God. This is, of course, why any money-dealing in spiritual matters, and especially in the cure of souls, is to this day called *simony*. But the sin of Simon is far wider than the term *simony*. It applies to all those who, however they may disguise it, try to buy God's supernatural gifts, or render to Him a *quid pro quo*. "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gifts of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." We need not stay to complete the history of Simon Magus. The Bible says nothing of him after he uttered those

words which might have been the crisis of his conversion: "Pray ye to the Lord for me." But Church History tells us the rest, and points back to him as the great heresiarch.

But what has all this to do with us? We don't offer money for supernatural gifts. If there is one point in our confused theology which is quite clear, it is that what God gives is "without money and without price." Didn't all Europe rise up at the time of the Reformation against the shameful indulgence traffic, the sale of pardons? Why did Zwingli oppose Samson, and Luther oppose Tetzel, if it was not to reassert the Christian truth of the freedom of God's grace? Why did the Council of Trent abolish the very office which Tetzel held, if it was not that they, too, recognised the same evangelical truth, which the abuses of a degenerate age had thrown into the shade? Why—some people have gone so far in their fear of seeming to limit the freedom of God's gifts, that they have sometimes a very unnecessary dread of good works. We do juggle so strangely with our consciences. And the last phase of the jugglery is that while we still have a holy horror of "good works," we have incorporated all that is false in what is called justification by works with our own pet theory which we call by another name.

Let me try to explain what I mean, by putting the true and the false side by side.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Every good work, every kind action, every holy thought, find it where you will, is of God; derives its impulse from Him, and tends towards Him as its end. There is no such thing as a good work done without the grace of Christ and the Inspiration of His Spirit! The Divine power to do such acts, which we call grace, cannot be *bought*, nor *earned*, nor *paid for afterwards*. It is without money and without price; and Christ gives it to all, to each according to his capacity of receiving it. He is the Light Which lighteth every man in the reason and the conscience, the natural intuition of truth and goodness. His is the motive power in every noble act or thought throughout the heathen world. It was He Who singled out the Jewish race for the education of the world; it was He Who, in the fulness of time, came and took our nature into God; and when His visible Presence was withdrawn, founded the Divine Society, which, with its Ministry, and Sacraments, and guardianship of the Truth once delivered, shall abide till He comes. It is He Who, by His Spirit, speaks to the soul in the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, guiding, comforting, healing, delivering, saving by the Revelation of Himself. There is nothing of human merit here; no purchasing of God's gifts: yet this is Church doctrine, and this is Bible truth.

Now, see how human pride, and the desire to stand alone, has obscured this truth. We are so anxious to be our own saviours that at the very time when we think we are attacking one theory of human merit, we are inventing a new one. We who live under the Christian dispensation receive God's highest gifts *sacramentally* (I am using that word in its broadest sense of every gift of God which is given to us by some channel which God has blessed). By Holy Baptism we are regenerated, grafted into the Divine society, made partakers of the new nature. Then by God's mere goodness we are made members of Christ, children of God, heirs of Heaven.

What has the infant done to earn such a blessing? Nothing. Now see how subtle our heart is in deceiving itself. We actually, many of us, deny the truth of Baptismal grace, *because the child has done nothing to deserve it*, as if God could not give a blessing which man had not somehow bought! And the methods

by which men explain away the fact that God has given so great a blessing to a little helpless child are numberless. One will say, "The child didn't believe; but by a sort of legal fiction, the faith of the parents and god-parents *did* instead." Did for what? Served to satisfy our human pride that all the work was not God's, but man had something to do with it. And others say, "The Baptismal gift is not *given*, it is promised on certain conditions, only by a charitable hypothesis the words of the Prayer Book say more than is literally true. "Seeing now this child is regenerate," means seeing now that this child will, we hope, some day be converted." And why all this juggling with plain words? Just that man may have the initiative and not God; just that the poor dross of human effort may buy a priceless gift; just because we will not have God's grace as a free gift from Him. Do you think the impulsive Apostle St. Peter, or the tender, loving St. John, would bear such insult to God's love without breaking out in such words as once terrified the sorcerer Simon? "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gift of God can be purchased by money."

After Baptism, *Confirmation*: the most misunderstood of all the Christian ordinances. What does Confirmation mean? Once more a free gift of grace with which our works and deservings have nothing whatever to do. The child is now going to face the battle of life with all its perils, and God is going to give the armour and the strength needful for the fight. "Baptism," says an old writer, "is the sacrament of life. Confirmation is the sacrament of warriors." But that is not what most people understand by it. It is one of the losses to be set against the gain of our more careful preparation for Confirmation, that it so easily makes the children think too much of *what they are doing*, and too little of *what God does for them*. Why, we hear people again and again talking as if they were going to confirm something instead of to be confirmed. They are going to take upon themselves their baptismal vow, as if it had been on some one else all along. They are going to dedicate themselves to God, as if God had not made them His own before they were old enough to speak. They are going to make a public profession before the congregation of Faith in Christ, as if God had left them to themselves for some fifteen years while their characters were forming, and then called upon them to choose. Isn't it true that the human has thrust out the Divine in the minds of many, and all the time they think they are so far removed from Popish theories of good works! The truth is, the children may as well think, as some do, of the dress in which they are to be confirmed, as of the part which they are going to play in an ordinance in which God freely does everything, and they do nothing but receive a gift. Preparation for Confirmation is only this: The removal of barriers which stop the inflow of Divine grace, the clearing of the channels by which God's Spirit is given to us.

And is not the same true of Holy Communion, and of those more secret spiritual ministrations which God has sanctified for the soul's help? The great truth of the necessity of Faith for a worthy receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ has been perverted into the view, that we contribute a creative power which transforms the Sign into the Thing Signified, which, if it were true, would be a greater mystery than that which we are called upon to believe in. We come to receive the greatest gift which man on earth can receive. But we do nothing; God does all. No, that is not true. We have the power to refuse the gift which God is holding out. We refuse it when we build up barriers of conscious sin; we refuse it when we offer the dross of human merit; we refuse it when we talk even of our faith as bringing down to us that which is the gift of God's free love. God's gifts cannot be purchased by money, be the coin what it may. Surely

it is not only those, if such there are, who plead their own good works as a claim upon God's grace, to whom He, the loving Lord, will answer, if not in the impulsive denunciation of St. Peter, at least with those sad words, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

We cannot earn or purchase God's gifts, but we can use, or lose, or refuse them. That is the tremendous power of man's free will. It cannot deserve or call down God's grace. What need is there when the showers of blessings are falling thickly around us, when God is making the sun of His Presence to rise on the evil and the good, and sending the rain of His manifold gifts on the just and on the unjust? We cannot earn or purchase; we cannot make God our debtor; we cannot, according to the old scholastic distinction, establish a kind of moral claim on Him. But we can so use His gifts as to receive them in fuller and larger measure. This is the teaching of the parable of the talents.

It is a law in the Kingdom of Grace, as in what we call the natural world, that faculties are strengthened by their use. "He that hath, to him shall be given"; and God giveth more grace to those who use what He has given. It is a thought well worthy of meditation, that perhaps it is the law which explains the wonderful knowledge of God which we find in those various Oriental systems about which we now hear so much. Does not God lead the Mohammedan and the Buddhist as He leads us, and draw near to Himself those who are ready to follow the first impulse towards God? If to us He has given ten talents, while they have fewer; if we by His goodness have been received within the circle of the Christian Church, while they are being drawn to God only by a dim, strange longing after a perfect life, is not the initiative His, is not the end Himself? God made us as He made all men, to find their perfect development in Christ; but to us He has revealed His purposes, showed how He longed for us to rest in Him, manifested Himself in human nature, to take that nature into God and teach us the power of self-sacrificing love. Who of us will dare to say that he has lived up to that light which the Gospel has shed upon our lives, or moved forward in the strength which that Divine Humility can give? Ah! the pride which ruined Adam, the pride by which the Angels fell, the little pettiness of self comes in and mars all. It is so hard for us with our Western ideas—ideas largely impregnated with Christian truth, our highly developed consciousness of personality and individual worth, our vigorous, almost athletic morality, our earnest, practical life, our constant protest against anything which would merge our individuality even in God, to realise the great sacramental truth that personality is not lost, but perfected in Him CUI SERVIRE EST REGNARE. And so we go astray, and think we vindicate our freedom by a voluntary choice of chains. We want to be independent; we want to pay our way; we want to purchase the very gifts of God; though the money that we think we give is not our own.

In the solemn hour of dying all the flimsiness of these things is seen. Our righteousness? It is filthy rags. Our gold?—It has turned to dross. Our strength?—It is very weakness. Our bright robes?—They are moth-eaten. Our good works?—They are *not*. Then we see the truth. God grant we see it before it is too late. Then there flashes upon us the philosophy of life, the true theory under which, if we had believed our Creed, we should have lived our lives. I am nothing, but God is all. My greatness is that God looked down on me as worthy of His love. He chose me, He strengthened me, He led me, He blessed me. That was all His. And what was mine? Only the littleness of unreal greatness, only the weakness of a fancied strength, only the money which would buy me nothing, only the false self which now is *not*.

Dear people, wouldn't it be worth while for most of us to try to live more in the faith in which we hope to die? Why go on as we do, making bargains and simoniacal transactions with God? Why make so much of self when the time must come when we shall long to say, "Not I, but Christ in me"? Why put off the "Christ in me" till death, when it ought to be our joy from Holy Baptism onwards for ever and ever? If self drives out Christ in this world, how will it surrender to Christ in the world that is to come, where He must be "all in all"?

Our Sins of Thought

BY REV. W. E. COGHLAN, B.A.

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness," &c.—Acts viii. 22.

"Thought is the life-blood of the soul; often is the tongue silent, and the body at rest; but thought is busy still; it courses, like the blood in our veins, with ceaseless activity along the passages of the soul"; it yields companionship to the poorest inmate of the village cottage, as well as to the rich and learned and the inmates of palaces; by its power we retire into ourselves, and reign supreme over our little empire, wherein none amongst our fellows can enter.

If we would discover whether or no we have the true spirit of the Christian pilgrim, toiling for the reward to be won hereafter, and enjoyed in the royal City, not made with hands eternal in the heavens; if we would discover whether or no we have cherished and nurtured the grace given unto us, when the sign of the Cross was marked upon our brow, we may not judge by our acts alone; they are done in the sight of approving friends, and before the world, which smiles and caresses and tempts us with its flattery; we may not judge by our words alone, which are often the result of society's laws, uttered in obedience to society's custom. But our thoughts! what are they?

Now as nature is beginning to smile upon us again, and to clothe herself once more in vernal beauty; as we enjoy that beauty, do our thoughts mount to the Giver of all good things—the Author of nature's sublimest wonders; do they rise upwards towards the attributes of God—towards the person, the majesty, the sufferings, the work, the promises of our Blessed Lord; towards our own spiritual condition, our hopes and our fears, our ever-approaching eternity? Or are our thoughts for ever dwelling upon the fleeting joys of worldly life; plans of business and of pleasure, anxieties to please and efforts to conquer?

As thought passes in one continual current through the soul, is there nothing to be seen or heard but voices and faces of this corrupting earth? As the Angels whisper their call to holiness, are they rejected and despised; will the soul never dwell in rapture upon that divine music, whose echoes we cannot fail to catch, the music of Heaven's unselfish hosts as sinners turn to God?

Would we all had an ever-abiding, keen-sighted conviction that our Father "is about our bed and about our path"; a conviction by night and by day that He is the Companion of our thoughts, sharing with us our inner life.

Would that our faith were strong enough to behold the Saviour Himself interceding, working, pleading by His Spirit; and sorrowing, too, as each wilful soul opens the door to sinful suggestions and meditations which have power to expel Him from His temple.

Each deliberate thought of sin defiles the purity of the soul's secret life; indulged and caressed, it grows and spreads its corruption. "The Christian soul

is a temple," says one ; " why then is the inner shrine polluted by the imagery of evil ? Why do the tables of the money changers disfigure the outer courts ? Why are the five senses—the gates of the temple—so open to all thoughts and spirits who would pass within ? The Christian soul is a temple ; why make we not a covenant with our eyes, lest they admit ought that may soil its purity ? With our ears, lest they give access to voices that jar upon the harmonies of the inmost shrine ; why strive we not with the Apostle in prayer that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so glorifying God in our bodies and our spirits which are like His own ? "

We must repent and mourn over our daily and hourly departures from the law of purity, and pray God if perhaps the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us. This surely should be our daily supplication to the God of mercy. The thoughts of our hearts need all the forbearance and long-suffering that Calvary's sacrifice could win. Where is that never-dying Christian grace which clothes the soul in beauty ? Where is the charity that thinketh no evil ? We dwell upon the sins and faults of others ; to think of their departure from the path of rectitude, of the spots and stains upon their reputation, is often the keenest of keen delights ; many of us draw comparisons between our own observance of religion, and the short-comings of our neighbours ; the Pharisee is still walking amongst us in all the ugliness of his spiritual pride ; he stands up within the temple of his own soul, and congratulates himself that he is not as other men are.

We want the spirit of the Publican, who smote upon his breast, and cried in humiliation, banishing from his thoughts the contemplation of all sin but his own, " God, be merciful to me a sinner."

Thoughts of impurity, too, that invade the soul like a mighty flood, and tear it from its anchor ; we must pray to God, if perhaps these thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us. They are the most dangerous and soul-destroying in the dark and gloomy catalogue. 'Tis madness to play with them, 'tis destruction to court them. Many and many a man now is drawing near to the grave, having spent but half the allotted life of man upon earth, feeble in frame, crushed and desponding in spirit, who would give worlds if he had stifled the first whisper of impurity that lured him away, if only he had had the courage and manliness to deny himself the lesser for the greater blessing ; the courage to fall down upon his knees, and plead earnestly for the spirit of self-surrender to the unchangeable law of purity.

Thoughts of infidelity, too, which lead us lazily to dream over things as we fancy they ought to be, instead of manfully taking them as they really are ; the finite mind sitting arrogantly in judgment upon the revelations of Divinity.

In these days of increasing light, amidst the labours of God-loving scholars, there is no place for ignorance, no excuse for the servant who knows not his master's will.

If the soul is to live hereafter, the question of its happy or miserable existence is not to be solved by indolent contemplation ; as our thoughts dwell upon its origin and destiny without an effort to push forward into light and truth, we bring upon ourselves the reproof and warning of St. Peter to Simon the sorcerer, " Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

There is nothing for it, as evil comes before us, as come it will, there is nothing for it, but to rush to prayer, to plead and wrestle for the armour to defend us.

It is the first whisper we have the power to crush ; the infant thought we

can trample on and destroy. We must not stand idly by, as it grows and eats our life away. In the very midst of our business and our pleasure we still can pray; surely the soul that lives in the conviction that the Father is more ready to hear than His children to pray can dart one quick glance to Heaven and pray earnestly, though the tongue utter no word; these unuttered supplications of the spirit have power to reach the Saviour of mankind.

The true voice of the heart's deep agony, wrung from it by the felt presence of the tempter, and the sense of its own abject weakness, must ever be heard by the Friend of sinners. "Can He from Whose temples the precious blood was pressed by the crown of thorns; can He, Whose human soul was poured forth in agony beneath the olive trees of Gethsemane in expiation of our sins of thought, can He turn a deaf ear to the fainting spirit which He has redeemed, when the phantoms of evil haunt it, when the enemy threatens it with death?"

Rather does the believer clasp to his heart the certainty of willingness and power to save; His voice sounds lovingly from the age of prophecy, and promises salvation; "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee," &c.

The Sin of Simon

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness," &c.—Acts viii. 22.

I. Notice first the difference between the Gospel miracles and those of a mere magician like this Simon.

Power by itself is an ambiguous sign. There are other powers in the world besides God's. Powers which have broken loose from God. Powers which oppose God. Powers which God permits, for a time, for the trial of His people, and for the overthrow of those who will not be His people. Such a power was that exercised by this sorcerer. It came, we may say, by itself; as a disjointed, isolated thing; for the exaltation of a creature; to make beholders say, "This man is the great power of God." It did not come to attest anything. It did not come to say I have a message for you from God; and if you ask how you are to know that it is from God, this is the sign. That is the true use of power in connection with Divine truth. It ought to come as the third part of God's triple seal: first goodness, then wisdom, then power. That was the use which Jesus Christ made of power. He did not come to startle men into acknowledging Him as "the great power of God": His work did not begin there, nor end there. He began by showing forth in daily life a perfect holiness; an entire self-control and self-devotion; a spotless unimpeachable righteousness of act and word. He fulfilled every relation, He endured every trial, of human life, as no mere man ever did or ever could fulfil or endure each. He drew from His very enemies the confession, "Never man spake like this man." And then, along with these two (we may presume to say) higher and more unequivocal signs, He also wrought miracles of power; healed disease with a word, stilled wind and wave at His pleasure, cast out devils, raised the dead. At last, He raised *Himself* from the dead. Now this has never been the order of an impostor. He may astound men, like Simon, by his sorceries; he may avail himself of Satan's strength, and in that strength "do many wonderful works": but you may be quite sure that he will never use the power of Satan to overthrow Satan's kingdom: nor can he gain from all the powers of darkness skill to clothe

himself in the armour of light. He may "bewitch men with sorceries," but he will never succeed in counterfeiting those other parts of God's seal, which the truly candid and the truly wise will wait for before they call either him or his "the great power of God."

We are all in danger of too much worshipping power. Money is power, and talent is power, and rank is power, and office is power, and knowledge (above all) is power. But all these things are of the earth, and will perish with the earth. Be not ye led astray. Power-worship is too often devil-worship: this Simon, with all his show, was a creature grovelling and crawling and creeping among things of time and sense. Let the power you worship be all God's power. You will know it by its signs. You will know it by its pointing upwards; by its drawing you towards holiness, towards good, towards charity, towards Heaven, towards God; you will know it by its making the unseen world real to you and the world of show and semblance less attractive. That is the effect of God's power, as it is reflected even in the poor imperfect characters of His children below; how much more, as it shines in the holy Book, or streams upon us from the mercy-seat above "in the face of Jesus Christ"!

II. Again, we must recognise in this narrative what we are all slow to acquiesce in, the existence amongst us, by Christ's intention, of a Visible as well as an Invisible Church.

We see how men fight against this truth. We have all heard of Christian people endeavouring to make for themselves a circle within a circle, a Church within a Church; a little community, inside the great Church of the baptised and professing Christians, which shall be all sincere, all consistent, all holy, all saved. That has been the origin of most sects in the Church: men have been weary of the formality and hypocrisy and heartlessness which had taken possession of the visible fold below, and have sought to go apart with a few, of whose consistency and devotion they could be assured. And men will scoff at our Church of England, as having held to the belief that the time for judging is not yet, and the test of judgment in God's hand not ours. If we bury a careless, worldly, or sinful man with words of hope and blessing, because he has never been cast out of the Church by a formal sentence, and must therefore be construed as still belonging to it, however unworthy; you know the outcry which is raised against us by many who ought, we think, to know better; ought, we think, to remember that even in the first days of the Gospel there was a Simon Magus baptised by Philip the Evangelist, and recognised as a member, though an unworthy member, of the Christian community by two of the Apostles themselves. "Let both grow together until the harvest" is the rule of Divine wisdom as much as of Divine forbearance. If you attempt to judge you will err both ways: you will often be taken in by loud profession, you will oftener be driven into uncharitableness, into harshness, into injury of souls. Simon was allowed to be baptised, because he said that he was convinced by Philip's miracles that Jesus was Christ. Simon was allowed to attend upon Philip's ministry, and to partake in all the ordinances of Christian communion, on the strength of his own profession, and in the expectation of a higher and a truer judgment.

We do well to allow this latitude to others, and we do well to claim it for ourselves. While the day of grace lasts we must shut out from hope and from privilege no one who desires and claims either. And if others were to sit in judgment upon us, where should *we* be? How often have we been inconsistent, worldly, careless, sinful! How often must even a human judgment upon us, if it was to be, have been unfavourable, severe, condemning! And yet it would have been the worse for us to be shut out prematurely: we have been the better,

every one of us, or we might have been for that forbearance which has given us time and space for amendment : till the curtain falls upon life's little drama man is bound to hope, because God has not yet spoken in judgment. May He give us grace to use the opportunity thus vouchsafed !

For indeed we know that, under all this profession, all this which man is bound to respect, and to treat (while he can) as if it were genuine, there is an eye upon the heart. It is not that this unchallenged profession really implies a favourable issue. There is One Who sees all our false ways, and "that which is highly esteemed among men is" often "an abomination in the sight of God." Yes we need patience, but we need severity too ; patience from others, severity from ourselves, and a union of both from God. We are bold, and we are also timorous ; bold in sinning, then timorous in repenting : and we need both the ready baptism of the Evangelist, taking us on our profession, and also the stern rebuke of the Apostle, bidding us to repent deeply of our wickedness, if perhaps the thought of our heart may be forgiven us.

III. Let us ask ourselves what was this particular sin which required in the case before us so stern a reproof. Simon offered money to the Apostles to share their gift with him. He would purchase the Holy Ghost with money. The very idea is blasphemy. We all shrink from it. The law of this land calls a particular offence, that of trafficking in the care of souls, of buying and selling sacred offices in the ministry, by a name derived from that of this man *Simony*. It were well if that offence were more clearly defined, more strictly interpreted, and less easily evaded. But need I say that this is not the only nor the chief sense in which we can be guilty of the sin of Simon ? We are not tempted to offer money in purchase of God's spiritual gifts : but we are tempted, many of us, to that state of mind out of which Simon's sin, in his ignorant condition, naturally sprang. Simon had that mercenary mind which St. Paul calls the "root of all evil." He thought that money could do anything. He deified money. Knowing what it was to him, how he taught for money, and practised sorcery for money, and aimed at popularity for money, and set himself up as "some great one" for money, he took it for granted that everyone else regarded money in the same way ; he came to two Apostles, and assumed that they, like himself, thought nothing too great and nothing too holy to be bargained about and trafficked for. Alas ! "let him that is without sin among you" in this matter "cast the first stone" at him ! Alas ! what an idolatry of money is there in a Christian land, in the Christian Church ! What revelations are daily made of the light in which we look at money ! If there are none now who seek to buy God's gifts with money, at least are there not some who consent to sell their own souls for money ? O these dishonesties in trade, in speculation, in trusts, yes, even in charity ! If we really cared for God's gifts, I can even fancy that some of us might offer money for them. If we do not offer money for God's gifts, is it not because we care ten thousand times more for things which money can purchase ? Money can get a luxurious table, a well furnished house, a gay equipage ; or, if there is not enough for these, at least it can buy us a humbler or a coarser kind of bodily indulgence : it can do more ; it can buy consideration, it can buy flattery, it can buy fawning and cringing, it can buy a thousand attentions while we live, and a few crumbs of gratitude when we lie low in death. But I will tell you what no money can buy : it cannot buy any one of God's highest gifts ; it cannot even buy health, or eyesight, or comeliness ; it cannot buy the affection of one human being ; it cannot buy repose of conscience, hope in death, or a single ray of the sweet and secret and supporting love of God. And therefore a man who learns by long habit to think

that money is everything is as much what the Scripture calls a fool as he is what the Scripture counts a sinner. That thoroughly mercenary mind is one of the very lowest and most debased types of the fallen human character. That is the real sin of Simony. It is the state of one who has allowed every trace of the divine to be eaten out of him by the perishable. It is the state of one who thinks that religion itself is a sort of separable external gift, a thing which may be got whole, and put on and worn as a sort of cloak or girdle. The idea of a change of heart, of a new creation, of a gradual, a growing, at last a complete transformation of the mind and soul after God's image, after Christ's likeness; of this he has no conception. If, when he lies on his deathbed, he can command the services of a clergyman, as he can command the services of his lawyer and his physician, that, he thinks, is enough to fit him for his long journey: "Give me also," he says, "this power," that I may receive, without having sought, the gift of acceptance with God, and eternal life! This is the very sin of Simon. It is the being altogether of the earth, and yet expecting to have Heaven too. It is the bringing all that is base and mean and corruptible, and expecting to receive—not in exchange for it, but along with it—all that is spiritual and eternal and Divine. To such a spirit it may well be said, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Yes, "pray God": He is "very pitiful, and of tender mercy": He can unwrap from the soul its long habit of a grovelling worldliness, and give even to the covetous and the mercenary His unspeakable gift of repentance unto life.

Confession and Absolution

BY REV. W. E. JELF, B.D.

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness," &c.—Acts viii. 22-24.

It is a matter most essential to our religious life, to our continuance in a state of faith, or our recovery from a state of sin, that we should rightly understand the nature and value of the several means which God has left us for these purposes. The Christian is not left to struggle alone; his Master does not merely watch him from Heaven as he stands or falls, but deigns to give strength to his feet and light to his eyes, to strengthen him when he stands, and raise him up when he is fallen. We are placed in the Lord's vineyard, we must take care not to pass by or neglect the spiritual food which He offers to us, lest we perish in our want.

And as this is true at all moments of our spiritual life, so is it especially so at our seasons of repentance. At such times, if our feelings are earnest, we look round on earth and up to Heaven to seek for an answer to the desires and doubts which rise up side by side with our awakening sense of our calling and profession. "I have grievously offended Christ; how may I be reconciled unto Him? I have cast Him forth from my soul; how may I recover my Heavenly Guest? I have done despite to the Spirit of grace; how may I regain His holy influence? The world hath set its hand and its stamp on my body and soul; how may I shake it off? How may I again lay hold on the blessed hope of everlasting life?" Our Lord has given us an answer to these doubts in those dispensations of His Word and Sacraments and prayer which He has left us as powers and pledges to faith or to repentance.

In the remarkable history from which my text is taken, there is much which bears on this point, and therefore has for us a peculiar interest. On the one hand there is a man, of great wisdom and power, seeking pardon for his sin against Christ, and on the other an inspired Apostle, to whom the ministry of mercy was especially committed, himself filled with the mind of the Lord and the especial grace of the Holy Spirit of truth, disclosing to the penitent the counsels and hope of recovery. The words of St. Peter to Simon Magus are spoken to all ages and all people.

And first in answer to those who make absolution from the mouth of the priest at once the sole and the complete immediate means and seal of pardon, we may remark that though Simon Magus most evidently desires forgiveness, he does not request absolution at St. Peter's hand, but prayer on his behalf; and St. Peter, though he evidently desires that Simon Magus's sin may be remitted, yet does not offer him absolution, but bids him seek for it in repentance and prayer.

It is an easy scheme of religion which makes confession consist in recounting and unveiling sins to a fellow man, repentance in the performance of some act of bodily suffering. It is far easier to confess with the mouth than with the mind; far easier to cast forth evil desires, lusts, imaginations in words from the lips, than in will and in deed from the heart; far easier to repent with the body than with the soul.

In the Scriptures the Sacrifice of the Lamb, the satisfaction for sin once made, for ever abiding, is set forth as the sole cause of the forgiveness of sin, and of all other Christian privileges, as well of those which we enjoy in the Church militant, as of those for which we look in the Church triumphant. There may be other (in common language so called) causes more remote, as the eternal will and love of God, or other causes merely instrumental, as the ministrations of the Church, her prayers and Sacraments; but THE SACRIFICE is the act whereby pardon is wrought for us, wherein our sins are hid. It is by this that the love of God was worked out; of this the ministrations of the Church are but the representations and channels. The pardon, of the least as well as the greatest of human sins, is written in His blood, and bears the impress of His crown of thorns.

It was by virtue of this His Sacrifice that Christ was able to leave behind to His brethren a never-failing promise that sin should be forgiven, whether of those who turn to Him from heathen darkness and lusts, or of those who having fallen away from Him, bethink themselves in time of their Father's house.

But to render these promises effectual there needs something on man's part. It is not enough that they should be around and about us, that we should belong to a Church wherein they are openly set forth and taught: we must apply them to our own soul, so that our sins may be covered: we must receive them ourselves into our most secret heart, allow them to leaven our reason, guide our will; we must believe that Christ died for all; and moreover that He died for us. And to this end it is clear that a man must feel himself to be in a condition to receive this promise: and hence the necessity of a change of mind, for casting off the old man and putting on the new, giving up foolish and worldly lusts, and turning in serious earnest to God, before we can come before Him for pardon with confidence; and this not only as something imposed on us by God as a condition of our forgiveness, but as a consequence of our being unable without such a new spirit to apply to ourselves the promises and accept the pardon which is offered us in Christ.

For as this pardon depends on the sacrifice of Christ, it is evident that a man cannot grasp it unless he feel himself to be a Christian at least in heart and intention. As long as he knows that he is clinging to some sin ; that he is walking after the flesh ; that sin in any one of its thousand shapes has hold of the springs of thought and action within him ; as long as he has a desire toward, and love for, things displeasing to Christ, it is quite clear that though he may firmly believe that Christ is the Sacrifice for sin, he cannot believe that He is the Sacrifice for him personally ; for if he hath not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.

I do not of course mean to say that the presence of sin and even sinful motions in the heart exclude a man from pardon ; then indeed could no man hope, for if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves ; but there is a wide difference between sin dwelling in a man and reigning in a man, sin resisted and sin encouraged, sin kept under and sin unheeded, sin struggled against in sorrow and abhorrence, and sin welcomed with smiles, and indulged in with joy : one is a consequence of the infection of nature which doth remain even in them that are regenerate, the other springs from the will which hath forgotten its new birth, and cast off the new man : it is the sign of Christ being lost to us, of His enemies having crucified Him afresh in us. The first step then towards pardon is the cleansing of our soul in will at least, and desire, from the sins which we have admitted therein, and leaving of those things which unchristianise us.

And to this end of course confession is necessary, for therein we set forth before God our sense of having offended Him, a sense that our sin is exceeding sinful : we declare that we see and mourn over our disobedience, and are willing and desirous to turn to the wisdom of the just.

And confession generally is of two sorts. 1. Of our general sinfulness and imperfection as sons of Adam, whereby we are led to put our whole trust in Christ, and thus led on to hope in Him for that which we cannot hope for in ourselves ; out of darkness God maketh light unto us. 2. Of those particular sins and acts of sin whereby we have fallen away from our Baptismal faith, and have brought ourselves more or less under the old dominion of sin : and of these we cannot if we are in earnest think without fear.

Next, those sins which we cannot think of without fear we must learn to hate : to do this we surely need only remember what they are, who put them into our hearts, whence they have cast us down, whither they are bringing us ; there is no evil, no woe, no enemy like sin ; there is no evil which brings us to so great loss, or shuts us out from so great gain ; there is no woe so great as that which is the beginning of woe everlasting ; there is no enemy like him who destroys both body and soul in hell.

But for one who has confessed his sins in fear, and renounced them in abhorrence, it only remains that, being by baptism in the pale of the covenant, he receive into his own soul with faith and thanksgiving the promise of Christ that his sins shall be forgiven, keeping in remembrance the Sacrifice of Christ, as that whereby they are forgiven.

Further, as one of the effects of sin is to make men when they are leaving it doubtful of the extent of God's mercy, or as long as they continue in it carelessly confident of impunity, it has pleased our Lord and Head to commit to the ministry of His Church, and to give His ministers therein, power and authority to pronounce to His people the great truth that sin is absolved and remitted on repentance : so that the too confident and careless sort may take warning that forgiveness is the lot only of those who are Christians, the other sort take comfort and confidence from this authorised message of assurance.

We are not, however, to suppose that the gift of absolution derives its power from man's word, or that it is sealed by the will of the priest. Pardon is prepared in Heaven by God's mercy in Christ for those who repent; it is set forth on earth by the ministers of reconciliation through Christ; it is made effectual to the soul by the faith of Christ which lays hold of it; it is ratified in Heaven by God's justice which accepts the one Sacrifice once made as the atonement for repented sin; it is sealed in the soul by the Holy Spirit as He returns in love and power to the repentance which desired and to the faith which accepts the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

And this general declaration and message of God's mercy in Christ Jesus, as pronounced for all by those who have power and commandment so to do, each one must apply for himself to his own individual soul. The priest stands forth as the messenger of Christ, even as those who in days of old preached the glad tidings. His voice is the same as theirs; the word whereof he is the bearer falls with like power on the souls of those who are able and willing to receive it: his message declares the sins of those who do not repent to be retained, and they are retained; the sins of those who do repent to be remitted, and they are remitted; he proclaims the bonds of those who are bound, the liberty of those who are set free, but he can frame no decree from Heaven, nor alter by a single jot or tittle the decrees registered in the book of life or of death.

And this practically was the language of St. Peter to Simon Magus: the message of forgiveness on repentance, "Repent, believe, and be baptised, for the remission of sins" was then everywhere proclaimed. St. Peter bids him lay hold of this message by repentance and prayer.

Though the remission does not proceed from the priest who speaks, nor from the words that are spoken, but from the eternal truth which they represent, the eternal Sacrifice of which they embody the results, yet doubtless there is the same grace and power resting on this message pronounced by God's authorised ministers as on all those other institutions which God has from the first appointed and hath preserved to us in His Church, for the more effectual comfort of the faithful, and the recovery and preservation of sinners. The message finds its way all the more readily to the soul, affects it more deeply, abides in it more powerfully for being spoken by those who speak it in God's name, and by the commandment and commission which He hath given them.

And it is by this general absolution that in our own Church the wants and desires of the penitent are ordinarily provided for. There are two cases wherein she admits of private and personal absolution, but in both these cases it is not for the greater efficacy of the pardon itself, but for its more effectual reception by the soul which is yet trembling under the remembrance and dread of its sins; it is to give such a one comfort and assurance. It is not the priest that holds out his arm, it is Christ's arm alone that is held out to save; it is the priest's office to reassure the man who fears that it is not still held out to him.

For some men are altogether careless about their sins; confession before God they hold to be needless—God surely knows them already; absolution, too, needless—they trust to be forgiven in the end; as each last sin is hidden from their view by a new one, they fancy that it has passed away.

Others again are too ready to believe that their sin is pardoned, and think a few thoughts, a few words, a few shadowy resolutions will serve their turn well enough; they verbally repeat the confession which the Church puts into their mouths, but without any serious recollection of or sorrow for their personal sins, and then the words of absolution sound in their ears without being effectual in them or to them; they make no effort to grasp the meaning or the power

of the message they hear ; they do not apply it to their individual sins ; it passes away as the shadows of heaven pass over a barren mountain ; they hear it as a mere form of words which they have so often heard before ; forgetting that each time they hear, it is an offer from God to save them, a loud call to repentance : that each time they hear it in vain Satan has succeeded in making them again turn from the means of grace.

Others again, whose high view of their Christian calling has given them a deep sense of the heinousness and consequences of sin, so that their love is all too trembling and doubtful, they many times find it difficult to believe that the many provocations are indeed pardoned ; their self-condemnation makes them doubt even that which they most desire to receive : and for such as thus cannot quiet their consciences, the Church has in her exhortation to the Holy Communion pointed out a remedy in the benefit of absolution ; not that they are to seek at the priest's hands that remission which they would not find at Christ's, but that he may assist them to repent, and assure them that on repentance pardon is indeed given, that the sins of him whose heart is with Christ are so washed in His blood that were they even as scarlet they should be as drifted snow. So again on a death-bed when a man's sins are rising up and looking him in the face, telling him of the opportunities he has neglected, of the little progress he has made in spiritual knowledge, of his having so often forgotten Christ, and served the world or the flesh ; when they are whispering to him that he is theirs, and trying to make him turn away in doubt from God's mercy ; what shall so fitly calm the trembling soul, and drive away those thoughts whereby Satan is trying to prevent his dying in the faith and fear of Christ, as the assurance that Christ will in no wise cast him out, pronounced by the authorised ministers of His word ? they may tell him that it is part of their commission, part of their ministry of reconciliation to proclaim the mercy of God to all who truly turn to Him ; they may tell him that if he has indeed repented, he is indeed forgiven ; on his assured repentance, and at his own earnest desire, and for his greater comfort, they may, as the stewards of God's word, the apostles of Christ's promises, enable him more wholly to lay hold of his pardon by absolving him in Christ's name from the sins he has committed. They may bring Christ before his eyes as the Saviour Who willeth not the death of a sinner ; they may bring him to Christ as a sheep that was lost, as one which had been dead but is now alive again.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

BY REV. T. F. CROSSE, D.C.L.

"The Angel of the Lord spake unto Philip," &c.—Acts viii. 26.

Philip, this was a great change. You have been preaching to crowds in an important centre ; your ministry has been most successful. The people with one accord have given heed to the things you spoke, and there is great joy in that city of Samaria ; your words have gone home with power. And yet now God tells you to leave all this busy scene of your usefulness, and to pass at once from excitement and activity down into a *desert*—"Go unto the way which is desert." How many of our own friends have been laid aside by ill health ! how many more of us have to remain all our lives in humble and obscure positions, when something perhaps whispers we should do very well for more important place and fortune ! What numbers there are who never get any good opening

at all, and, without a chance of rising, have to go down step by step, and year by year, into the desert way of lessening activity and waning usefulness. "I have learned," said one, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." And Philip may teach us to-day how, while God seems to take away He is really giving, while He seems to deny promotion He often really grants it, and how in His most unpromising dealings we may often at length discover His fullest performance. This we shall presently see in the case before us. Philip, thus ordered by our text, "arose and went." And as he trod the solitary way, and wandered on among the silent plains, wondering perhaps, like many another, at his bootless errand, at last he saw a little dust-cloud of a coming chariot. God had sent a man to meet him.

We should call this an accidental encounter: but the accidents of men are the providences of God, and who can say, with this page open, that perhaps we who meet from day to day are not brought into company by accident, but by some wise design and friendly purposes of God unknown to us? If so, how careful should we be, that our converse should minister grace, and that, in our dealings with one another, we should suspect the existence of a secret mission, and be found fellow-helpers to the truth!

If Philip, the servant of God, was sent to do good to him who sat in the chariot now coming close on the road, that man on his side was one who might do even Philip good, too, and who certainly is a very full example for us. He was a man of great note in his own country, and held there an important post; indeed, he was probably the chief minister of state in Ethiopia. I take it the way he came to be so far from home was this: he must have read in his own distant country a book which interested him extremely; he must have made inquiries about it and heard, "This is the Bible, the religious book of the Jews, the people who have knowledge of a true God, and worship in His own temple." And he must have come to that beautiful decision the other heathen, Ruth, did, though unhelped like her by the strong support of family affection: that "people shall be my people," and that "God my God," and so he had joined Israel, and become a proselyte and convert; and here he was actually coming back from the temple of Jerusalem, whither, in his earnestness, he had been all the long way to worship. Now, that great man of Ethiopia would never become a great man among the Jews. He could only get to the edge of their privileged state; and yet he was one of those who would "rather be a doorkeeper in the house of his God, than to dwell in the tents of unrighteousness."

Some of my acquaintance intend to see about religion by-and-by, when they have more time, and their fortune is made, or their business affairs are less anxious. You know some such yourself, perhaps. Look here at this man! The weight of a kingdom on his shoulders, the whole treasure of his royal mistress in his charge, and yet insisting to make time that he might go this long way round to serve God aright. A great man, and yet not above being simply religious; with his own authority and his worldly fortunes at stake, yet seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and, instead of clinging to his honours, his place, and his repute, running some risks in them, and found here far from home, on a long, hard journey, in a way which was desert.

And how was he passing the hours as his carriage slowly went along? His face was now turned homeward, and his religious duties done. Was he making up the time which had gone, and, with his tablets out, calculating his affairs? He was reading, and busily, but the book was the Bible, for his heart was in the matter, and he really was digging in the mine for truth. Only a few months before that the Lord our Saviour had said, "He that seeketh findeth," and

now He will send His own answer to the soul which is listening and looking to Him. We read, "*Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*" So Philip went up, and found him at his Bible, and reading aloud the very central things in it, and going over the very central points in it, his soul already led up by the Spirit to the very attitude at which the question came in just fitly for him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" "How can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach unless they are sent?" And Philip, truly commissioned of God, thereupon preached to him out of his own chosen text in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah—"The sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow." Then that foreigner learned the justification of the Gospel: how we have all sinned, and have broken the first covenant, which binds us to perfect obedience, and how we should have no defence but that God has laid upon Jesus the iniquity of us all, so that we can plead His sufferings for our pardon. Then, also, how God has appointed a new covenant of faith and repentance, ministered by the Holy Ghost in which we live, so that if we believe in Christ, and desert our sins, walking in those graces declared as the fruit of the Spirit, then we are accepted in Christ, and, if we die, are secured to eternal rest and glory.

For those travellers, the way was no more weary or desert. As the loved Old Testament, thought by thought, gave up its meaning, and was changed over into the deeper fulfilments and longer, brighter prospects of the New, the heart of the stranger must have glowed as he found the middle wall he had left at the Temple now for him thrown down; he was no longer an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, but a child of the covenant of grace. His heart being ready, and his faith ripe, only one thing was wanting to complete his peace—yes, one thing, for he could not venture in his real piety to slight those ordinances of the Gospel which some have held so cheap. Philip could not tell him that baptism was an empty form: nor could he himself imagine it a thing to do without. It is his very first thought and want and claim, and with the earnest purpose of a man bent on coming to his godly aid, "See," he says, as they pass a certain water—"see, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?" What should hinder him? His short conversion had been long prepared, and though the setting on this Christian seal would be a moment's act, the instrument had been years in doing. "If," said Philip, "thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest"; and he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Some of the early creeds are very short; this is the shortest of them all; yet it holds all their substance—for those who with all their heart believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, believe that with Jesus Christ "God will freely give us all things." Here is the one article of the standing or the falling Church. With this faith, no lot is lonely, no trial hopeless, no religion vain. Without this we are yet only travellers in the way which is desert, waiting for the coming of some humble Philip, and the times of refreshing from the Lord.

St. Philip's Encounter with the Ethiopian

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"*The Angel of the Lord spake unto Philip,*" &c.—*Acts viii. 26-30.*

The exposure of Simon Magus's wickedness and its censure by the Apostle must, one would think, have acted as a sort of check to St. Philip the Evangelist, and have occasioned him some annoyance. It was he who, in the simplicity

and unsuspectingness of his heart, had admitted this bad and worldly-minded man into the fold of Christ: and it might easily have occurred to him that it would be well to be more cautious for the future, and not to administer Baptism without some test of sincerity in the applicants for it. And the explicitness of the directions which led him into the desert, and threw him across the Ethiopian, may have been God's answer to his thoughts. When the Ethiopian asked for Baptism, Philip might have demurred about conferring it had not the guidance of God's Hand in the matter been so very plain that it could not be mistaken. First, a supernatural guidance *from without* had been vouchsafed to him. An Angel of the Lord had directed him with great explicitness to take the journey on which he fell in with the eunuch. There were two roads leading from Jerusalem to Gaza, the northern one by Ramleh, which was more populous, the other through Hebron, better adapted for carriages, but wild and unfrequented, invested by marauding tribes and wild beasts. Strange as it might seem, Philip, a lone man, obliged to go on his feet, is directed to take this latter and more southern route. When he arrived at the point where the road from Jerusalem fell into that by which he had come from Samaria, he saw a chariot, in which was a person of some consequence, who, to beguile the tediousness of the route, was reading the Scriptures of the Old Testament aloud. Then a second intimation was made to Philip, which must have banished all doubt from his mind as to God's design of Grace towards the Ethiopian. This time the intimation was from within. "*The Spirit* said unto Philip" (by an inward prompting which could not be mistaken), "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."

It is observable that when, later in the history of the Acts, St. Peter is to be sent to the Gentile proselyte, Cornelius, with the view of admitting him formally to the fold of Christ, his Jewish scruples as to the propriety of such a step are overruled by a similar twofold intimation. He sees a vision, and hears a voice from Heaven, which explained the lesson to be drawn from it. And "while Peter thought on the vision, *the Spirit* said unto him. Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them."

St. Philip's mission to the Ethiopian was a prelude of St. Peter's apostolic mission to Cornelius. Both the eunuch and Cornelius appear to have belonged to that class of men which the Providence of God had prepared as a sort of bridge, whereby the Gospel might pass over from the Jewish to the Gentile mind. Both were proselytes, that is to say heathens by extraction, who had been converted to Judaism by the manifest traces of divinity which distinguished the religion of Moses, and by the correspondence of the law of Sinai with the law written upon the human heart. These proselytes adhered to Judaism, according to their convictions, with more or less strictness. Some appropriated only the monotheism of the Jews, their doctrine of the Divine government of the world, their hope of Messiah, and the chief points of their morality; others went so far as to receive circumcision, and submit themselves to the ceremonial law. Of Cornelius it is strongly implied, if not actually asserted, that he was a proselyte of the less strict kind, one who did not belong sacramentally to the Jewish Communion. For when the Jewish party at Jerusalem allege against St. Peter his intercourse with Cornelius, they do it in these terms: "Thou wentest into men *uncircumcised*, and didst eat with them." The Ethiopian may have been a proselyte of the stricter class, in which case there would be a method observable in the admission of Gentiles to the Christian covenant; first, *circumcised* heathen, of which the Ethiopian would be the first recorded instance; secondly, *uncircumcised* heathen, of which Cornelius would be the first specimen.

Some commentators have supposed indeed that this Ethiopian was a Jew by birth, who, like Daniel, had risen to eminence at a foreign court, and that the term "Ethiopian" denotes only his residence, and not his extraction. This view is adopted for the purpose of making out that St. Peter was the first who ever admitted a heathen born to the privileges of Christianity. And St. Peter no doubt *was* the first who did this formally and officially, and under the sanction of the Apostolic commission. There seems, however, every reason to suppose that Gentiles had been admitted to the Church before Cornelius, though this step had never had the seal of the Apostles impressed upon it, until St. Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptised in the name of the Lord. A truth may be recognised some time before it is formally recognised. A king succeeds to the throne of his ancestor, and is saluted as king, the moment his ancestor expires; but he is not formally recognised as king until the day of his coronation.

What more remains to be said about the antecedents of the Ethiopian may be briefly despatched. Judging from the name of his queen (which, like Pharaoh, was a dynastic name, inherited by all the rulers of the country, and not the designation of an individual) he belonged to the kingdom of Meroe, an irregular territory on the south of Egypt, included between two or more rivers, and nearly corresponding to the modern Sennaar. This kingdom was apparently founded by Egyptian colonists, and inherited from Egypt its civilisation and its arts. But whatever might have been its origin, it rose to wealth and power. Its natural productiveness—its gold, copper, salt, timber, millet, and game—combined with its situation, by which it commanded the trade of the Red Sea, of Egypt, of Ethiopia, and the interior of Africa, was the secret of its wealth. Its power was shown by the stand which a former Queen Candace had made against the Roman arms in Egypt, about a quarter of a century before the Christian era. She was ultimately defeated, but showed such spirit as to win very fair terms from Augustus Caesar, and to procure a remission of the tribute usually imposed in such cases. The incident which we are considering occurred about fifty-six years after that defeat, and doubtless under another queen. The Jews, we know, had spread very widely in Africa. In the earlier half of the third century before Christ, their Scriptures had been translated into Greek at Alexandria, and disseminated, no doubt, through the adjacent regions. This chamberlain of the queen, who held the post of first lord of her treasury, had come across them and their Scriptures. What passed between him and St. Philip shows conclusively that, though high in station, he had a docile, simple spirit, eager for instruction, and willing to follow what approved itself as right to his conscience. He had been struck by the Jew's religion, and believed it to be from God. His belief involved a periodical pilgrimage to Jerusalem, at the time of the great festivals. These journeys must have been inconvenient to one in his position; and, at a heathen court, where the ram-headed Ammon was the great object of worship, may have entailed some risk of obloquy and suspicion; but he did not on this account decline them. He was returning when Philip met him from the devotions which he had been paying in the Temple. And he was careful to nourish those sentiments which he had received in public worship, and not to let them evaporate too speedily in the atmosphere of the world. It was a Rabbinical maxim, that "one who is on a journey, and without a companion, should employ his thoughts in the study of the law." Upon the principle of this maxim he was acting. He was reading aloud (as is the custom of Orientals, even when by themselves) the book of the Prophet Isaiah. It was by no means the plainest part of the Old Testament, for it was not narrative, but prophecy; and we are expressly told that he found obscurities in it, and required explanations. Yet

it opened ever and anon glorious prospects for the future ; and there was a pathos and a majesty in the Prophet's style which had a strange power to attract and rivet him, even as "spices" (to use Bengel's simile) "transmit their fragrance through the wrapper which enfolds and conceals them." The missionary whom he encountered in the desert unfolded for him the wrapper, explained the mystery which had baffled him, and, in doing so, led him on to a higher faith in God than he had hitherto known. And thus was fulfilled in his case the promise, "To him that hath shall be given." He had been faithful hitherto to the Divine guidance, and now it is vouchsafed to him in larger measure. He had diligently used the lower means of Grace exhibited by the old Covenant ; he is now admitted, as his reward, to the first Sacrament of the new.

I. We have here, then, the first instance on record of a private ministration of the Gospel. The total change in the sphere of St. Philip's labours is very observable, and must have surprised him very much. He had hitherto been labouring in the city of Samaria. And his labours had been successful on a large scale. "The people" (in the original it is "the multitudes") "with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." The sensation of joy consequent on the reception of those tidings passed like an electric shock through the *whole* population—"there was great joy in that city." And now, by the Divine command, he is withdrawn from this large sphere of usefulness, and sent into one of the desolate highways of the country. And when he arrives there a single man is pointed out to him—attended probably only by two or three retainers—as the new field of operations to which he is called. Now for all those who look down on private ministrations, as compared with those which take place in the theatre of the congregation, and which give more room for the display of gifts, here is a correction of their error. It is true, no doubt, that by a law of sympathy which is part of the constitution of our nature, gatherings of men are more impressionable than individuals, and the argument which falls cold and dead in private, seems to glow and circulate in a crowd, and to gather a new power of conviction as it passes from mind to mind. Men act by a certain instinct on one another ; and when they are in close neighbourhood, the least impression made is contagious, and multiplies itself with great speed. And it is also true that in the economy of His Church, God has recognised this law of sympathy, and makes it the basis of His operations, putting honour upon the ordinance of public preaching, and attaching the promise of our Saviour's Presence to a gathering of Christians, however small, in His name. But be it observed that even Apostles, who had a commission to "go, teach all nations," and, in virtue of that commission, might have challenged the whole universe of immortal souls as their audience, did not think themselves exempt from the labours of private ministration. "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," says St. Paul to the Ephesian elders, "but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and *from house to house*, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The message of the Gospel announced in public has, when opportunity offers, to be enforced in private, to be applied to the wants, emergencies, trials of a particular soul. For indeed Christ ransomed with His precious blood, not all of us only, but each of us ; and it is on that ground that His Gospel is to be carried not only into the midst of His assembled Church, but into the recesses of the individual heart and conscience. And an attempt to carry it thither, made judiciously under the guidance of God's Providence and Spirit—an attempt directed, like St. Philip's, to fall in with the current of thought in which the mind of the person addressed is

running, and to reach the conscience at a moment when it is impossible—may often be largely blessed, as St. Philip's was—the more largely, perhaps, because in such an attempt there can be no room for display, and therefore the motive in making it must be single.

II. There is another point in which St. Philip's new sphere of labour is remarkably contrasted with that which he has just left. The Samaritans, among whom he had met with such success, were a simple people; and we may perhaps gather from the impression which magical arts and miracles made upon them that they were chiefly of the lower class, not persons of station or influence. The eunuch, on the contrary, is a man of large wealth and high position, and (for those times) of some education—the first minister at a queen's court. Philip works no miracle before *him*, to show that the message he brings is from God, but quietly falls in with that process of thought which is going on in his mind, and thus brings him to an acknowledgment of God's truth.

There can be no doubt that wealth offers great obstacles to piety. "How hardly shall they that have riches," said our Lord, "enter into the Kingdom of God!"—hardly, because the possession of riches so insidiously entices the heart to trust in them for a contentment and a satisfaction which they can never bestow. And there can be no doubt, also, that the life of a *court* is unfavourable to the development of piety, unfavourable from its many hollow forms and courtesies, which must tend to kill simple and natural feeling, and in a *despotic* court (such as probably was that of Candace) from the servile adoration of power to which a courtier would be tempted. But in order to show by the most convincing method of proof—example—that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God," and that grace is able to surmount any and every difficulty arising from our circumstances, instances are presented to us in the Old and New Testament of men who have attained eminent sanctity and stood high in God's favour, while at the same time they have been men of wealth and influence—have stood next to a throne, nay, in some cases, have sat upon it. Among these, Daniel in the Old Testament, and this Ethiopian in the New, shine with peculiar lustre. There is something analogous in their fortunes, which, though the materials in the case of the Ethiopian are so scanty, enable us to draw a parallel between them. Both rose to wealth and eminence at heathen courts, and held high trusts from heathen sovereigns. Both, though placed in these difficult circumstances, fulfilled their religious duties with a brave and admirable fidelity. Both were students of prophecy, for the eunuch was found reading the prophet Isaiah, and Daniel tells us of himself: "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." And we may add that to both was sent a messenger of God for the elucidation of prophecy—to Daniel the Angel Gabriel, who both gave and interpreted the prophecy of the seventy weeks; to the eunuch St. Philip the Evangelist, an inspired human ambassador. And the lesson is in both cases the same that whatever be the circumstances in the midst of which Divine Providence has thrown our lot, however adverse to piety, however apparently blighting to the spiritual life, grace can enable us to walk in the midst of them unharmed, as the three holy children walked in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. How vain usually are our complaints of the position in which Providence has placed us; how much our reluctance to serve God lies really in the will, not in extraneous hindrances; and how certainly should we find, if moved to some other station of life, that instead of escaping temptation thereby, we had only exchanged a lower form of it for a higher.

III. Another thought arises from the high station of this Ethiopian to which a little prominence may fairly be given. His position, and the influence it gave him, made him a peculiarly valuable convert. St. Philip, by his withdrawal from Samaria, had not thrown away his labour even in a numerical point of view. All souls, it is true, are of equal value intrinsically and in God's eyes. For the very humblest and most ignorant, no less than for the loftiest and most refined, was paid down the ransom of the blood of Christ. But of course it cannot be said that each soul has an equal circle of influence, or is equally adapted by its circumstances or its endowments to bias other souls. There are some who live in comparative isolation from society, or who, although they mix freely with their equals, are so low down in the social scale that their opinions cannot be widely felt. And there are others who, from the possession of commanding abilities or commanding station, inevitably carry many with them, and multiply their own convictions in the minds of others. One of the former is as dear to our Blessed Lord as one of the latter; nay, are we not led to believe that the poor, the simple-minded, the unlettered are among His most favourite disciples? But for the purpose of winning others by his example and influence a convert of the latter class is the more important. Like a seed, he has the power of self-propagation; in him is the germ of many, and perhaps of many influential converts. And Philip, probably, when borne away from the eunuch, turned to this thought with satisfaction. Many as had been the souls he had won in Samaria, this man was, in all probability, the pledge and augury of many more. He would carry the Word of God into a new continent (a continent, by the way, which was afterwards to boast many famous Churches and eminent saints), and would plant it there from the vantage-ground of a station all but the highest. Who could see limits to such an influence?

IV. Finally, learn a lesson from the eunuch's employment when St. Philip met him. He was reading the Scriptures with an inquiring and a candid mind. No opportunity could have been more favourable for the arrival of God's message of mercy and peace through Jesus Christ. "Behold, he readeth the Scriptures," is nearly as hopeful a symptom for the soul as, "Behold, he prayeth." When God sees anyone studying the Holy Volume with simplicity and earnestness. He throws Himself across that man's path, whether by a human messenger, or by some dispensation of Providence, or by the inward teaching of His Spirit, until the scales fall from the eyes of the reader, and the study which was begun in darkness and perplexity is concluded in light and joy.

A Special Mission

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"The Angel of the Lord spake unto Philip," &c.—Acts viii. 26-38.

I. One brief word as to the practical care of God for the individual souls of men.

The object of all this whole transaction; this call, this journey, this preaching, this baptism; was one single conversion, one single salvation. Surely we see in it a proof, not only that God "will have all men to be saved," but that He will have each man separately to be saved. With thankfulness may we rest, as upon the universality, so upon the minuteness of God's love and of God's care for us. None of us can say that he is too insignificant for God's regard. See what God did for this stranger; how He raised up an Evangelist for him, and

marvellously threw him in his way, on purpose that he, he personally, he individually, might see salvation! The course of human life is still full of these interventions, of these special calls and missions. Look into your own life, and can you not see some such dealing of God even with you?

And then we should notice how it is through such single, several agencies that the work of God, His chief and most abiding work, is ever wrought in our world. The Gospel has some, yea, many influences of a more general nature upon human life and human affairs. We do well to recognise these, and to give thanks for them. But the truest, highest, deepest work of God is wrought through the thorough inward change of individual hearts. Each soul that is really brought thus to God becomes in its turn a little centre of light and life, from which shines forth the truth and the grace, the illumination and the persuasion, which is to draw others also after Him. We must never count any time wasted that is spent upon the instruction and the conviction and the correction of one human being. That work, if it be genuine, if it be heart-deep, is a work not of a narrow, isolated character, but of extended, it may be of large and wide influence, upon the cause of Christ and of the Gospel in the world around. And let no man count his own soul's culture a thing of trifling moment. He, too, if he be indeed brought to God, may be in his turn the Evangelist, if not of a nation, yet at least of a family, at least of some one precious human soul.

Thus, even thus, does God work: happy are they who thus, even thus, can work with Him!

II. Secondly, as to the importance of being always ready for duty.

"Your feet shod," St. Paul writes, "with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." It is one part of the Christian armour; a Gospel readiness for action. Philip had to take a long journey in quest of one convert. Nay, without knowing beforehand that he was to make one convert. He was told to go and strike into a road which was desert. O what excuses, what answerings again, should we have made in reply to such a call! How should we have urged the disproportion between the means and the end; the distance, the difficulty, the improbability, the waste of strength and time; till at length we should have gone one degree further, and persuaded ourselves that we never were called to it, that there had been a mistake, that God had not spoken. It was not thus with the blessed Evangelist before us. "He went forth, not knowing whither he went." He only knew that the call was clear and that God was all-wise.

God does not now speak to us by an Angel, or say expressly by a voice within, Go here or go there. Yet, besides His more obvious commands as to the fulfilment of duty and as to the avoidance of sin, you all know that there is often something within you which says, There is such or such a person whom you might benefit in soul or body, such or such a friend whom you have lately neglected, such or such a poor neighbour whom you might visit for comfort or cheering or counsel. These monitions are akin (though in a humble degree) to the call which reached Philip, "Arise, and go toward the south." And these inward promptings are easily resisted. They do not come to us exactly in the form of injunctions or prohibitions. They are rather suggestions, optional suggestions, which it is not apparently a sin to put aside. In the same degree are they the better tests and touchstones of our Christianity. They say to us, Here is something which you might do for your Saviour. Perhaps it may fail; but there is a chance also of its succeeding. If you feel your debt to Him as you ought, you will go and do it. At the same time I do not say that you will sin if you do it not. And this alternative, this liberty to go or not to go, this absence of command and yet suggestion of a possible good, shows an honest man

what he is. If he always finds an excuse for putting it aside ; if he always persuades himself that he is not called to it ; if he is glad when something occurs to make it for the time impossible ; if he rejoices in discovering that weather or business or health has taken off from him the burden of present duty ; then he should indeed suspect strongly the nature or the vitality of his faith ; he has upon him at present the mark of the unprofitable servant, who was satisfied to " dig in the earth, and hide his Lord's money."

On the other hand, how frequently—not always, but frequently—is an effort of this kind consciously rewarded ! You have roused yourself to leave your warm fireside ; you have walked through rain or snow to the poor man's cottage, or you have dragged yourself, indisposed and weary, to the home of some dull and uncongenial acquaintance ; and you regarded it all as a penance, or as a good deed to be put down to your reckoning ; how often have you found that that day was one on which your visit was singularly seasonable ; it was a day of peculiar distress, of unusual loneliness, of absolute destitution, to the person whom you sought out ; or else it was a day on which the heart long closed was opener than ever before to the word and to the love of Christ, and it was your happiness to be an evident instrument in God's hand for the refreshment and encouragement or restoration of a human soul for which Christ died and rose. These things, not indeed to be reckoned upon or looked for, yet are God's occasional means of giving to him that hath, of drawing onward in the path of love one who has just set his first foot upon it, of showing us that " His service is perfect freedom," that " in keeping of His commandments there is great reward."

III. And next as to the importance of being always in pursuit of good.

Philip was ready to go : the Ethiopian was prepared to receive him. He was studying and musing over God's Word. He was trying to make it out and to put it together ; trying to read on till he should understand ; eager to hail a new teacher, however humble his rank or however alien his race. " To him that hath shall be given." That is God's rule. If we would have, we must use. This man had an Old Testament. You scarcely know, possessing the New Testament also, how dark the sayings of the Old must have been to him without it. Many of us would have said—for we say it now—I can make nothing of the Old Testament. It only puzzles me : it makes my darkness darker, and my ignorance more ignorant. I will let it alone. But so did not the Ethiopian nobleman. He, like Simeon, like Nathaniel, like older saints still of whom we have the record in the Bible, " desired to look into " the mysteries of the ancient Scriptures, " searched " with themselves " what or what manner of time," what or what manner of event, the inspiring " Spirit did signify, when it testified beforehand " of the things that should be hereafter, and pointed men's thoughts onward to the expectation of One that should come. And therefore they saw what to others was mere confusion. " Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day ; and he saw it, and was glad." Half the revelations of God depend upon the piety and reverence of him who receives them. There is a growth in knowledge proportionate to a growth in grace.

Many of us err grievously, at last err fatally, in this respect. We have no patience, and we have no humility, in the things of God. When we are asked, " Understandest thou what thou redest ? " we answer confidently, " I see," and therefore our blindness becomes permanent. " How can I expect some man should guide me ? " how hopeful, and how rare, is that answer ! No : we take it for granted that in God's truth a thing must either be self-evident or unimportant. In this one, this greatest science of all, we consider study

superfluous. And yet there is probably no part of God's revelation, which is intelligible (spiritually, I mean) to a superficial study. When first we enter that sacred chamber, fresh from the glaring lights and tinsel vanities of his world, all is darkness; we can discern nothing; we are ready to say there is nothing to discern. Wait awhile. Habituate your eye to that shade. By degrees a faint glimmering of light will reward your patience. In an hour you begin to distinguish objects, and to move amongst them freely. If you had gone out at once in your first disappointment, what would you not have missed? Read on now in that holy page: new light will be thrown upon it day by day: in a year you will marvel at your first incredulity: and when the question comes again to you, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" you will be ready to answer, "Not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

Thus are the words verified in every age, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Again and again has the Bible been its own interpreter to those who studied it as in God's presence. Wonderful are the reports of those who have seen, in foreign lands or in our own, what the unaided Book can do for the humble and the earnest minded. God shines upon the page by His Spirit, and there comes forth from it at last a marvellous light. Not to supersede the human teacher, but to prepare the ground for him: to give him the joyful surprise of saying, "This hath God done, perceiving that it is His work": for the confirmation of his faith as of all who shall hear his testimony: it is found again and again that God has thus, by His own Scriptures alone, "out of the very mouth of babes perfected strength, that He may still" the arrogant pride of "the enemy and the avenger."

IV. The narrative before us illustrates the importance, both for strength and for comfort, of holding a simple Gospel.

Many of us pass through life without one single experience of the effect of the Gospel upon this stranger. We are so mistaught, or else so slow to learn; we are so afraid of presumption, and so fond of adding something of our own to the work and word of God, that we never reach anything that can call itself "the glad tidings of Jesus," or send us forth "on our way rejoicing." What Philip preached, what the Ethiopian received, was something which needed but one conversation for its statement, and but one hour for its reception. Evidently it was the simple declaration of a Saviour; a Saviour complete in His work for man; a Saviour, Himself our Propitiation, our Righteousness, and our Strength; our Sacrifice for sin, our example of holiness, our Almighty Enabler and Renewer by His holy and indwelling Spirit. This is what Philip preached. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." That is the Gospel, as God sent it, as Christ ratified it, as the Evangelists and Apostles preached it. Out of this Gospel flows all peace and all strength. Alas! we have added to it, and we have subtracted from it, till its vital energy is lost. God give us grace, ere it be too late, to call it back! There is none other. Any other Gospel is destitute of God's strength, because destitute of God's wisdom. No other Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every-one that believeth." By that test shall ye know "the precious from the vile." Take Christ wholly for your Saviour: see yourself lost, see Him an entire Propitiation; ask of God to receive you as you are, and to look upon you only in Christ: and upon you, in the same proportion, will arise in no long time a glorious light: in you will be fulfilled, as in thousands before you, the memorable words, "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. . . . In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory!"

A Man of Ethiopia

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"Behold a man of Ethiopia," &c.—Acts viii. 27, 28.

Pause a little here and contemplate that interesting stranger, while Philip opens to him the word of life. He is a man of Ethiopia. In the main, it is the country which is now called Abyssinia. It lies on the eastern edge of the African continent, north of the equator, and bounded on the east by the southern portion of the Red Sea. It is a land of mountains and rivers. Its climate is warm and its soil fertile. It is of great extent. In those days it was a powerful kingdom; and if its people were civilized, it might become powerful again. Some of the streams which constitute the Nile rise in Abyssinia.

The inhabitants are very black. Although we cannot be certain of the nationality of the queen's treasurer, yet, in the absence of any information to the contrary, we must assume that he was a man of Ethiopia by birth as well as by allegiance. In that carriage Philip sits beside a coloured man, and leads him into the kingdom of God. The Word is not, Blessed are the fair in skin, but, Blessed are the pure in heart. The Ethiopian's colour cannot be changed, but his character may. He may become a new creature in Christ. If he is born again, he will see the kingdom, and enter it too. It does not go by good looks. There is no respect of persons with God. A few days in the grave will make white and black people all alike; and the Ethiopian, if he has been renewed, will be very beautiful in God's sight when he rises from the grave. Angels will gaze in wonder on his gracefulness, as he enters the gates of the New Jerusalem.

This inquirer occupied a very high place in his own country. He was like Joseph under Pharaoh. Inasmuch as the sovereign was a woman, the first lord of her treasury would probably enjoy more power than Joseph possessed under an intelligent and active king. Irresponsible power is not favourable to spiritual humility; but, in this case, grace triumphed over all obstacles. Although the man had much of this world's treasure, it did not satisfy his soul. In some way, to us unknown, he had found out his sins, but had not yet discovered the way of pardon. His conscience told him of his guilt, but could not reveal a Redeemer. So the great man, to whom everybody paid court in the capital, went about bent under a load of grief, and inwardly sighing, Oh, wretched man that I am!

Someone—perhaps a little maid who had been taken prisoner in war—observing the sadness of the treasurer, intimated that he might obtain a cure at Jerusalem, where they worshipped the one living and true God. Having heard that there was a place on earth where God makes himself known, he could not rest till he found it. Judging from the length of his journey, the eagerness of his search, and the period of his return, we think it probable that he was in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. We have no account of how he spent his time in the city; but it is certain he would frequent the temple at the hour of prayer, and listen to those men of learning who explained the Scriptures in public, and kept alive the hope of a Messiah. It is possible he may have followed the crowd as it streamed along the Via Dolorosa early in the morning towards Calvary, and seen at a distance the elevated cross and the Man of sorrows. This sable stranger, we may be assured, did not mock, or join the cry, Crucify him. He would rather stand by in silent tears.

As yet however, the Ethiopian did not know Christ. Never man spake like this man ; never man lived, never man died, like this man ; but still the stranger did not know that here was opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness. He was very thirsty, and his lip was near the fountain of living water ; yet he continued thirsty still.

He must have been present at the Pentecost revival, and heard in his own tongue the wonderful works of God, spoken by Galilean fishermen. From the public assemblies he retired to the secret study of the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures again to the public meetings for prayer ; but all the while he was only a seeker—he had not found peace of conscience, pardon of sin, peace with God.

At last the time arrived when he must leave Jerusalem ; and, alas ! he must go empty away. He had not found what he came to seek. Having a carriage and servants at his disposal, he would doubtless carry water and other provisions, so that he would incur no danger of want in passing through the desert. But the water that he carried in a skin could not satisfy the soul of the Ethiopian prince. After he drank of that water he thirsted again. He was sitting in his carriage alone one day, with an awning over his head to defend it from the sun. A large parchment lay outspread on his knee. He was searching there for the water of life as eagerly as he would have searched near a group of palm-trees for a spring, if he had found himself alone and destitute in the desert. Some instinct in his soul, stimulated and directed by what he had seen and heard at Jerusalem, told him that near this spot the water of life would certainly be found. “ He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.” He pauses there. He cannot go past that spot. I think I see a great tear gather in the dark eye of the noble African, and dropping on the book. “ Led as a lamb to the slaughter ! ” This reminds him of the wonderful man whom they had nailed to the cross on Calvary. He muses alternately on the verse which he has read and the scene which he witnessed. His heart is throbbing, and his eyes are swimming. “ Of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some *other* MAN ? ” Does the word point to that *other* man who died on the accursed tree ? Those looks and tones were more like Heaven than earth. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. When the thief at His side cried, “ Lord, remember me,” he answered, God-like, “ To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” That other man ! Of whom speaketh the prophet this ?

At that moment “ the anxious inquirer ” lifted up his head, and desiered a solitary traveller marching on foot at some distance over the burning sand ; for you can discern an object at a distance when the ground is level, and destitute of vegetation. When they meet, the inquirer’s question is ready ; it had already been brooding silently in his own breast ; and now, when he finds a teacher, the demand comes out articulate and intense, Of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other man ?

Deliverance is near. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise. “ Seek, and ye shall find.” The Ethiopian was in downright earnest ; when he could not obtain pardon and peace in Abyssinia, he travelled to Jerusalem, and when he failed there he started on his journey homeward again ; but he continued seeking. He never let go ; the line between his soul and the Saviour Whom he sought was at no time permitted to slacken. He had leaned on it, and kept it tight. At night, when he fell asleep, he fell asleep in the act of drawing, as if he would, by violence draw a pardon down ; and when he awoke his spirit was still in the same attitude : “ I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.”

The Lord in Heaven is well pleased with this pertinacity and perseverance. He opens His hand wide, and satisfies this longing soul.

Philip and the Ethiopian

BY REV. WILLIAM H. DAVIS, D.D.

"Behold, a man of Ethiopia," &c.—Acts viii. 27-40.

Twice in the New Testament history the Gospel comes into touch with Egypt, once in the flight of the Infancy and once in this incident of Philip and the Ethiopian traveller. Both touches were transient, and left little, if any, impress upon this ancient land of the Nile; but each has a flavour of romance about it, and this last one carries practical and abiding lessons of Christian character and providence.

In its physical setting the scene is a striking one. A Jewish proselyte, drawn to Jerusalem by the feast of the Passover, is returning to Nubia over the usual highway between Palestine and the Delta, and as he journeys he is reading the evangelical prophet Isaiah, where, in the fifty-third chapter, we catch foregleams of the Gospel narratives.

Probably the recent Crucifixion of Jesus and the attendant discussions, which filled the capital at its yearly festival, over the Messianic character and claims, had turned the eyes of the devout to a fresh study of the Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah's picture of humiliation and unseparated sovereignty, while it fitted the facts, nevertheless ran counter to the traditional and current ideas of the coming King, and we do not wonder at the honest confusion of mind in which many earnest souls found themselves.

Perplexed over this problem of prophecy, the Ethiopian turns homeward with troubled mind. In this mood Philip, called by some divine messenger into this deserted south country, meets him, and in friendly converse opens the meaning of this ancient and wonderful vision, with the story of the manger, the message, and the cross, until, convinced and convicted of its truth, he stops the chariot at the first water course and is baptised as a Christian disciple.

The curtain falls, and Philip goes back to his work in the north, and the eunuch to the duties of his royal office in the south—perhaps to be the pioneer of the Gospel to the upper Nile.

In this incident we are not concerned with the mode of baptism at the roadside or the methods of Messianic interpretation or the authorship of Isaiah; but rather with the providence that blazes the path for our feet in all Christian duty and with these two genuine types of Christian character.

I. PHILIP'S READY RESPONSE.

We know not the exact kind of call which brought him from Samaria-way—possibly angelic and supernatural; but as the Word may mean any messenger, the message may have come from a vision of the night, or by the voice of a friend, or by the inward and yet real compulsion of a spiritual conviction. At any rate Philip knows, as any level-headed Christian man may know, what duty is and where it lies. And he had, what many of us lack, the grace of promptitude in Christian service. This quick obedience to the call is a phase of Christian experience which has been overlaid by the manifold reasons of gain and loss, of prudential considerations and personal preferences, until the major part of missionary appeals, the motives to Christian endeavour centre about the *cui bono* questions: the social results, the spiritual needs, the commercial advantages of mission work, instead of the clear, unqualified imperative of Jesus, as He sends His own into the world for its redemption.

Why go to Africa? *First*, because the marching orders say "Go." *Second*, and secondarily, because it pays to obey orders—scientifically, archaeologically, commercially, socially, historically, and spiritually. For the Church is surely of age sufficiently to know that while the Divine commands may have no penalties expressed, yet they always carry their own rewards and punishments.

Such spontaneous, willing response as Philip's to this call into desolate Gaza is an index of the healthy, unselfish character of his Christian life. Just as the Princeton athlete, who, the other day, sprang into the surf at Long Branch to save a drowning and unknown servant girl, with no thought of himself in a sudden call for help, revealed an innate nobility of character and the real possession of that knightly quality of *noblesse oblige*.

This promptitude of response is not only self-registering as to the quality, and quantity of the obedience that is in us, but it is a tremendous advertisement to all lookers-on of the vitality and joy of the Gospel itself. To move toward duty—doing with halting steps, as children drag themselves to school in June days, is to lose the zest of service and its reflex influence of soul cheer. Philip's path was a blind one and into the desert country, but he goes with a swift step and a willing heart.

II. GOD ALWAYS MATCHES AN OBEDIENCE WITH AN OPPORTUNITY.

This incident is a concrete illustration of the Divine oversight which is constantly mating wings and air, fins and water, in a world of providence and design, and teaches us that when God sends a call He also blazes a path for our feet—a fact of Christian philosophy which the acts of all Christian Apostles, ancient and modern, have verified for nineteen centuries.

You speak, after long hesitation and fear, to a friend upon the theme of personal religion, and lo! you find him waiting for your word and ripe for your wish.

You walk out upon an unfrequented path of Christian endeavour, and discover that the way was already trodden by unseen feet before you.

Philip is called into the desert with no apparent purpose. The way is lonely and the country is desolate—when behold! a royal traveller approaches, troubled over the great question of the ages—what to do with Jesus of Nazareth. Here is Philip's opportunity. He takes it, and an arrow of light is sent into upper Egypt from this bow, drawn, as we say, at a venture. Obedience is the pivotal thing; God takes care of the rest.

This factor of Providence in Christian service must not be overlooked, for it will inspire us with courage and a sense of companionship as we go upon out-of-the-way pilgrimages and take up heavy burdens. With this lesson of divine plan in life and all its ministries, *every* divine call will have such large possibility as to warrant no delay or selfish balancing of accounts for the triumphs of the desert. The successes of the "shut in" souls may be the grandest after all. We never know along what road God's providences are coming, the way of the desert or the way of the cross, in the desolate border town or in "Jerusalem the Golden," and therefore we must travel all roads as they who "wait for the coming of His feet."

III. THE PART WHICH THE INCIDENTAL EXPERIENCES OF LIFE PLAY IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TRUTH.

We dwell much upon the light which, in the Leyden pastor's phrase, shall break forth from the Word itself. The truth does grow clearer the longer we look, and multiplies itself as the stars do in the night sky, as every student of God's Book may testify; but to the rank and file of Christian disciples the side

lights of others' experiences are more illuminating than their own insight. The Ethiopian was in darkness with the roll of prophecy open before him, until Philip poured the light of his own eyes, and the hopes of his own heart, upon this strange vision of Isaiah, when suddenly a meaningless chapter in a familiar prophet glows with "the Light, Which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Thus we all grow in knowledge and in grace, more than we think, through the experiences of our neighbours and the insights of our friends.

The chance conversations, the familiar conference and prayer meeting, the Bible-class, the passing comment, the public providence and the personal sorrow, are all commentators upon the eternal truths. The only condition is that of the Nubian, a thoughtful mood and an open book, and all experiences and stray acquaintances shall pay tribute to our spiritual knowledge and Christian character.

In his "Imago Christi" Stalker dwells upon the use which Christ made of the chance opportunities of His life, especially His table talk and casual conversations with strangers, as affording an unparalleled modern opportunity for Christian influence, and yet one that is almost entirely neglected. The reason for this neglect is our failure to see in ordinary experiences and routine duties the most natural opportunities to brighten the light of the candle of the Lord in men.

Christ's best work in the days of Galilee and Judæa was *incidental* work like this touch-and-go scene in the desert road. We lean too much upon the "stated means of grace," the Sunday methods, and forget that our realest spiritual gains may come on Monday and our widest-open door of work may be in the market-place or at home.

Besides, these incidental helps are unexpected, and therefore the most winsome and abiding. We venture to think that Philip here on the highway was more influential with this stranger than he would have been the preceding Sabbath in the synagogue at Jerusalem. He found his man off guard and natural, as a pastor may find his people in their daily perplexities or the teacher her scholar in his out-of-doors naturalness.

IV. THE TEACHABLE TEMPER WITH WHICH THIS ETHIOPIAN FACES NEW TRUTH.

He hears strange news in Jerusalem, news which blights the most cherished hopes of an ancient race.

The Pharisees are bigoted and arrogant, the Sadducees are cynical, and the priests a unit in their prejudgment of the question, while the followers of the Crucified are few and scattered, and the heresy seems about stamped out; but in this stress of national prejudice, this atmosphere of bitterness, this man waits to consult the Book and ponder in quietness over these events before he passes judgment and chooses sides—an attitude of mind so catholic and just as to create surprise in this partisan century of the Christian faith: for it is an easy thing to get hard and set in religious opinion by appeal to our own interests, the traditions of the fathers, and the doctrinal standards of the past, until we are no longer fair and honest jurymen in the open court of religious questions.

Suspension of judgment, a patient waiting for light, and an earnest spirit of search, these are the characteristics of this treasurer of Candace—characteristics which we need in the twentieth century as in the first: for each generation has to travel a new path and solve a new problem, and the Ethiopian, rather than the Pharisee, is the type of the world's hope.

The Ethiopian and the Old Testament

BY REV. GEORGE ADAM SMITH, D.D.

"Behold, a man of Ethiopia," &c.—Acts viii. 27-40.

This is the story of an Ethiopian, who had been at Jerusalem to worship. It was a far cry from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. The capital of Queen Candace lay on the remoter Nile, over 1,200 miles from the capital of Judah. More than the distance, however, was what came between. 1,200 miles would be nothing to a man in search of religion, especially if he were of the patient and inquiring disposition which we see in this Ethiopian. But the wonder was that the greater extent of these 1,200 miles lay across Egypt—the most religious and fascinating civilisation of the time. Hosts of pilgrims sought Egypt from distances greater than Ethiopia: the study of her mysteries was fashionable in the great centres of Western civilisation. Her temples still spread their unbroken splendour across her sunny provinces: their vast walls covered with acres of sacred writing; their roofs, the platforms of gorgeous ritual and processions, that flashing drew the eyes of the people from leagues across the civil country. It was the most visible religion that ever tempted the desire of the eyes. But for the mind it had subtler attractions still. Like those dark temple doors, which still break the long sunlit stretches of painting and sculpture, and invite the tired observer to brood in their cool shade, the popular religion of Egypt presented, through its gorgeous surface, opportunities to studious minds to penetrate the mysteries of conduct and life and God. Nor was the Egyptian religion all mystery and splendour. It spoke with the austere simplicity of conscience itself upon the thousand common duties of this life. It was equally explicit on what was laid up for the righteous in the life to come. And it even exhibited a righteousness already victorious on earth in the person of one born of woman. By uniting its votaries to this Osiris, it succeeded in inspiring them with a most powerful enthusiasm for virtue, and a most complete assurance of immortality.

Through such a religion with its attractions for every instinct of man's heart, this Ethiopian in search of a religion made his pilgrimage. He must have passed the open doors of a score of temples before he prostrated himself in front of the temple at Jerusalem. For half at least of his 1,200 miles he must have been constantly in presence of a religion, the most visible and attractive in the world, hospitable to men of all nations, successful in lifting multitudes to communion with the unseen, not only vast and subtle for human curiosity, but clear and claimant to the conscience of man, and above all, with this glorious revelation in Osiris of righteousness clothed in man's flesh, sufferings man's sorrows and death, and yet in the end victorious and the pledge of victory to others. How was it that this earnest pilgrim passed it all by, esteeming the religion of the little tribe of Jesus greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?

The secret, of course, lay in his knowledge of a single book, for the religion of Israel had no other means than this of attempting the influence which Egypt exerted through her gorgeous ritual and vast literature.

This book is known to us as the Old Testament, and is commended to us by Jesus Christ as the revelation of His God and Father. But what it would have been to such a man as this Ethiopian, who had not heard of Christ? To him it was, at first sight, but a collection of histories, laws, psalms, and addresses called prophecies. They had come from various ages, some of them from very back centuries. But they were all Jewish and all connected by one idea: the

idea of a special covenant between God and the Hebrew nation. They told how the Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and earth, had chosen this people to be a people peculiar to Himself, had made them the trustees for the race of the riches of His truth: the ministers and agents of His purposes for the whole world. When we consider this central claim of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the uncompromising spirit with which it is so often urged, we may wonder that any man, who was not a Jew, ever found his way as a worshipper to Jerusalem. That the God of this little tribe should be the Sovereign of earth and Heaven! How stern He was to nations other than His own! A jealous and pitiless God engulfing armies to let His people free, depopulating a country to make room for them! How Jewish pride and passion grew rank beneath His partial providence! Jerusalem asserted to be the centre of the whole earth, to which the Gentiles should bring their substance. Zion and Jordan exalted above all the hills and rivers of the world—Jews to be kings and priests to God, but the sons of the alien their plowmen and vinedressers! Then what a people to be so favoured! According to their own records, an earthy, sullen, and at heart idolatrous people, unworthy of the least of the titles they claimed. And now as the Ethiopian lifted his eyes from the ancient Scriptures, which promised to such a people supremacy over the world, and the glory of teaching a docile humanity, what did he see as the result—but a people in the bondage and contempt of the world, their land a province of the great Roman Empire, themselves in the sight of civilisation an unhappy and uninteresting group of barbarians.

What prevailed with him and led him—as Christian was led past the lions to the Palace Beautiful—past those grim obstacles to the secret place of Jehovah? What is it that has given the Old Testament religion its unique and unapproached influence among the religions of the world?

Is it that it claims to be the Word of God? So claim the sacred books of every other nation upon earth. Is it that it is verbally accurate and infallibly true in matters of history? That is not a question which the Ethiopian was likely to have put; but if he had stopped to answer it, before coming to Jerusalem, he would never have found God at all. Is it that all the predictions of fact which the Old Testament makes have been fulfilled? The time at which this Ethiopian came to Jerusalem was not a time of the fulfilment of prophecy, but, on the contrary, one in which history and providence did seem to go utterly against the predictions of Scripture. Besides which, the Old Testament itself gives a very explicit warning against the attempt to prove the divinity of any religious teaching by the fulfilment of predictions of fact which may accompany it—because the heathen themselves and the false prophets are allowed to have the gift of prediction.

Putting aside these things, let us grasp at what the Old Testament essentially is, at what it most urgently offers to us. This is plainly a Revelation of the living God—of His Person, His Character, and His Will. It is this Revelation of God Himself which has prevailed, and must prevail, over all the undoubted difficulties that the Old Testament may cast in the way of those who approach it as this Ethiopian did from outside the limits of the covenant people. It is this to which every individual heart and conscience can feel itself drawn, and upon which it can make its decision. And besides—which is of great importance to us, if not to the Ethiopian—it is this which can be investigated by the exact methods of historical science at the present day.

Let us take the last of those tests. Scientific research has of late been busy among the religions of that branch of the human race to which the Jews were most akin. The result has been to prove that the system of religion, which

prevailed among the Hebrews, had a very great deal in common with the systems of the neighbouring and related heathen nations. This common element included not only such merely material forms as ritual and temple-furniture, or the details of priestly organisation and discipline, but even the titles and some of the attributes of God, and especially the forms of covenant in which God drew near to men. But the scholars who have been most successful in discussing these resemblances have, at the same time, emphasised their sense of an entirely independent and original principle at work in the case of the Hebrew religion. In the Hebrew religion—and in this alone among Semitic systems of faith—historians observe a principle of selection operating upon the common Semitic materials for worship, ignoring some of them, giving prominence to others and with others again changing the reference and application. Grossly immoral practices are forbidden; forbidden, too, are those superstitions which draw men away from a single-minded attention to the simple moral issues of life; and even such religious customs are omitted, which, however innocent in themselves, might lead men into temptation. In short, a stern and inexorable conscience was at work in the Hebrew religion, which was not at work in any of the religions most akin to it.

Now, when we turn to ask whence came this principle of selection that separated clean from unclean in Hebrew worship and this inspiration that rendered Hebrew prophecy the unique moral phenomenon which it evidently is in human history we find the answer in the character of the God of Israel. Each of the laws of the sanctuary is accompanied by the reason, "For I am holy." And when we ask the prophets for the source of their unique doctrines of God, their testimony is that they received them in personal communication with their God, Whose peculiar character is that, in their own words, "He is exalted in righteousness"; or that, as Isaiah said, "He is Holy, holy, holy, God high and lifted up." It is the character of Jehovah that draws His people from among the nations to their peculiar destiny; it is that character which selects and builds the law, that is as a hedge around them in the midst of heathendom; it is that which, in each revelation, discovers to the people alike the measure of their delinquency and degradation, and the new ideals of their service to humanity. Like the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, we see its presence before this favoured people, and its evident leadership of them all—van and rear, elect and bad, prophets and masses—at each stage of their march down the ages.

But the God of Israel is not only holy, but sovereign; not only the Example and Conscience of Israel, but the Judge, Executor and Vindicator of Righteousness in the history of the world; not only the Ideal of morality, but the Power Who brings real history up to the ideal; the moral Governor of the world Who makes purity and happiness, justice and victory, sin and failure to coincide.

But after emphasizing the Holiness of God, and His Power as Judge in the history of the world, we are not yet in possession of the whole secret of the Old Testament.

The highest moral ideal is not the righteousness that is regnant, but that which is militant and agonising. It is the deficiency of many religions, that while representing God as the awful Judge and Executor of Righteousness they have not revealed Him as its advocate and champion as well. Do you remember the lesson Christ gave us upon this? As Christ clearly proved to us when He refused the offer of all the kingdoms of the world, the highest perfection is not to be omnipotence on the side of virtue, but to be patience and sympathy and love. To will righteousness, and in its favour to rule life from above, is indeed

divine ; but if these were the highest attributes of divinity, and if these exhausted the divine interest in us, then man himself with his conscience and capacity to sacrifice himself on behalf of justice and truth, man with his instinct to make the sins of others his burden and their purity his agonising endeavour, would indeed be higher than his God. Had Jehovah been nothing but the righteous Judge of all the earth, then Jehovah's witnesses and martyrs, His prophets who took to themselves the conscience and reproach of His people's sins, would have been as much more admirable than Himself, as the Leader who saves his country on the battle-field and lays down his life for his people is more sure to win their gratitude than the king who equips him and sends him forth—and stays at home.

But the God of the Old Testament is not such a God. In the moral warfare to which He has predestined His creatures, He Himself descends to participate. The sins of men are not only the object of His hate ; they are the grief of His heart. That very feature of the Hebrew Scriptures, for which they are so often despised by unthinking people—viz., that they too much represent the Deity as clothed in the armour and moved by the passions of men—is their glory in so far as they thereby meet humanity's unquenchable desire for a God Who is not mere abstract Holiness or only Sovereign Justice, but One Who arises and comes down for their salvation, Who makes virtue His course, and righteousness His passion.

With what power of assurance did the message of forgiveness come to sinful men from such a God ! From some kinds of deity, the impure or the cruel, the word of pardon would sound simply ridiculous ; from other gods whose holiness is unquestioned, a sinner could scarcely conceive it as coming at all. But from a God Who has not only set men's sins in the awful light of His countenance, but taken them upon His heart, Who has made them His concern, His affliction, Who is pained by them and by their results more than the most contrite sinners themselves could be—from such a God will not a sinner hear his pardon come with assurance ? Must he not believe in the sincerity of the word which conveys it, as well as of the religious means by which, in sacrifice or otherwise, it is applied by the authority of that God to himself ? And, finally, with what new moral force does pardon come from such a God ; what horror of sin must it breed in the sinner ; how it must infect his soul with God's own travail and sorrow for sin ; how it must send him away to be, in the example of his God, an enemy of sin and a warrior against it !

These, then, are the facts about the Old Testament which may be said to have drawn this Ethiopian, as they will certainly, till the end of the world, continue to draw the conscience and the heart of man. A God pure and holy : the inspiration of the highest morality which history has ever known : Who, being lifted up before the vision of the purest men, casts them in dread conscience of guilt at His feet : and yet of sympathy and patience infinite : Who before the Incarnation was afflicted in all their afflictions, and before the Cross made their sin His burden and their salvation His own travail and agony.

So we may judge this Ethiopian to have found Him in His Scriptures, and to have been drawn by those voices that go home to the individual heart of man, whether Jew or Gentile, with irresistible force. The vision of this God wakened his conscience ; the urgency of that love persuaded his heart to faith : all that grace came borne home to himself on some particular promise. On the strength of it he arose, and went and joined himself to the chosen people of God ; he offered the sacrifices of righteousness, and his name was enrolled in the book of the living.

Surely he had now fulfilled to him the whole promise of the Scriptures. But no, as he returned from Jerusalem, he continued to read, and reading lighted on a passage, which, however full of those truths which we have supposed to have drawn him to Jerusalem, pointed beyond all that he had found there in the temple or in its system of worship. This passage was the confession of God's people, standing over against not only God Himself, but His Servant, with respect to Whom the confession was particularly made. It placed all the people on one side in trespass and guilt, this Servant alone on the other in absolute holiness. It owned that, though holy, He made the people's sins His conscience and His burden. He travailed in agony for them. Thus in two respects the Servant was like God Himself: He knew no sin; and He made His people's sin His concern and His agony. But the confession also declared that the Servant was to be in place of all those sacrifices for the putting away of sin, which the living God, in His concern for men's sins, had instituted. His life was to be a guilt-offering. And so by laying it down in death should He pass to be the people's champion and ruler. "Of whom," said the Ethiopian to the teacher God had sent him in his difficulty, "of whom did the prophet write this, of himself or of another?"

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Preached unto him Jesus! It was, of course, a history he told him. He told him how there had lately appeared within the experience of men One Who was the counterpart of the confession of God's people in this Scripture: One Who did give Himself out for the Servant of the Lord: One Who did know Himself to be on one side, and all men on the other: One Who did feel that He lay under a commission from God to make the sins of the people His conscience and His cross. Jesus was holy and sinless, and was so accredited of men. Like God's own love, His love was urgent with them for righteousness and truth. With God's own passion, He sorrowed for their sins and bent Himself to bear on His heart their misery and their shame. In all points He was that living God whom the Old Testament revealed—that living God in His holiness, His love, His passion.

We cannot wonder that one who had already come so far to worship Jehovah, proving by the length of his pilgrimage and the obstacles he overcame, how well he knew Jehovah's character and will, should recognise Jehovah and Jehovah's purpose in Jesus Christ, and be willing to be baptised into Christ's name.

And for what else do *we* come to Christ but this, that in His character and word and work He realises all the highest and most constraining that has ever been revealed to us concerning God? He is absolute holiness—and yet not far off. He is righteousness militant at our side, militant and victorious. He has made our greatest suffering and shame His own problem and endeavour; He is anxious for us just where conscience tells us we need to be most anxious; He is helpful to us just where our helplessness is most felt. Never before or since in humanity has righteousness been perfectly victorious as in Him. Never before or since in the whole range of being has anyone felt as He did all the sin of man with all the conscience of God. This is what He offers to do, what He claims to do: to remove our sins by bearing them Himself, and for the sake of that bearing to proclaim them, as from God, forgiven. The claim itself and the love in which it is made are themselves divine. But it is further accredited by His sinlessness; by His correspondence with the age-long instincts of the race; by His fulfilment of the hopes of every religion; and by the fact that He has satisfied whatever heart of man has trusted Him and taken Him at His

word. If, as conscience tells us, the true God is the God Who drew this Ethiopian to Jerusalem, then we can no more doubt than this Ethiopian did, that that true God was in Jesus Christ.

The Meeting

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."—Acts viii. 29.

Marriages, they say, are made in Heaven : that is, the steps of two, both being God's dear children, are so directed by an overruling Providence, that after each has passed over many windings, the two paths converge, and the two lives meet and melt into one like two rivers, flowing thenceforth one broader, deeper, stronger stream. Marriages are made in Heaven ; and two or three other things beside, marriages are made there. Meetings that are of shorter duration, and partnerships that are less intimate, come under the same rule. God, Who gives law to the ocean, does not neglect a dew-drop. The hairs of your head are all numbered. Our meetings and partings are under law to God. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

The meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian prince in the desert near Gaza is recorded with great precision in Scripture. On that meeting much depended ; from that meeting great things sprang. What hath the Lord wrought ! and how wonderfully He hath wrought it ! If His purposes in creation require the meeting of two circling worlds at some period in the evolutions of time, He will so arrange that the two shall approach and touch each other at the very point of space and time which He has designed. The same might and the same wisdom have been at work to arrange a meeting wherever and whenever one earthen vessel charged bears Christ, and another earthen vessel empty receives Christ at a brother's hand. We must not suppose that this meeting between the evangelist and the Ethiopian was arranged by the Lord, and that He leaves our meetings to the chapter of accidents. This case is recorded as a specimen of the Lord's way. This prophecy is not of private interpretation ; not a letter, but a type for throwing off millions. It is not that the Redeemer and Ruler of the world made these trysts in ancient times, and ceased to make them afterwards. He ceased to reveal and record them, after He had given characteristic specimens ; but He has not ceased to make them and keep them.

These meetings have been frequent in our own land of late years. Many messengers run to and fro, each bent on fulfilling his own commission, each bent on getting a soul for his hire. How thickly the royal couriers pass and repass. If our eyes were opened, the whole mountain would seem full of chariots of fire and horses of fire. See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, redeeming the time ; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the messenger sent by God to meet you on your path may heave in sight, and offer you the friendship of the King. The place whereon you now stand may be holy ground to you—the birth-place for a better life. On the right hand or the left, in the house of prayer, in the public street, in the lonely path, the messenger may appear, charged to win a soul to Christ.

Brother or sister still unconverted, if a message of love is out from the King to you, t'would be sad to miss the bearer in the busy throng of life. Would you not grieve if he should go by ? Then fear not : those who desire to meet him will not

miss him. That vacuum in a longing heart would draw the messenger and his message to your bosom although they were at the utmost end of the earth.

Though the place was desert and the path but dimly traced, and the time not told at all, Philip and the Ethiopian met, with all the exactitude of the tides and seasons.

See on a map—for the actual landscape is too wide to be comprehended in one view—the track of two converging rivers, from their several sources on separate mountain ranges to the point of confluence in the intervening valley. There are many windings in their courses. At some parts, indeed, they flow right away from each other, and sometimes back toward their springs; but in spite of all these partial and temporary divergencies, on the whole the two streams come slowly but surely to a common meeting-place. So spring far apart two human lives, and so these distant lives flow into one. God, Who made the mountains and the valleys, and bade the rivers run among them, brought these lives into being and brought them into one. He brought them together: and that for a purpose of His own. Stand in awe of the meetings and partings of life. Reverence the friendships which you form and the farewells which you pronounce. When one is a disciple of Christ, and the other is still of the world, the Master meant by the meeting that grace should find its way from the vessel that has been filled into the vessel that still remains empty. Vessel filled, freely you have received, freely give. Vessel empty, although all good comes from Christ the Head, much good comes through Christians the members. The one should strive to be, and the other to get, a blessing.

These Meetings, long prepared and wisely arranged in providence, are sometimes lost through obstinate unbelief. What a meeting that was in Herod's judgment hall at Cæsarea between Paul and Felix! How far up the lines of preparation for it ran; and how skilfully they were held in the hands of the Omniscient until the missionary of the Cross and the Roman ruler met at last! The Roman listened, and the missionary began: Now, Felix, now is your time; now or never. But he hardened his heart and turned away. He cast out the arrow of conviction after it had gone more than half way through the searing of his conscience. "Go thy way for this time": this time! fool! you will never get another. He thought he was only politely putting off the Christian; but, in reality, he was rudely rejecting Christ. To lose such a meeting may be to lose your soul.

That Ethiopian, on the contrary, being thirsty, welcomed the cold water. He received the Kingdom of God as a little child; and the Kingdom became all his own. He believed to the saving of his soul, and went on his way rejoicing. If any place in this world can remain consecrated more than another in the memory of the saints, that spot in the desert near Gaza is a sacred spot to one of the saved multitude who stand round the Throne in white clothing, for there he was born to the inheritance which he possesses now.

Philip ran to meet him. Hitherto he had walked, and that, perhaps, slowly. So when two objects afloat attract each other by hidden magnets, their mutual motion towards a meeting is slow at first and scarcely perceptible; but when they have approached near, the movement quickens, and they traverse the rest of the space at a rush.

The evangelist, on approaching the chariot, heard its occupant reading. The student, though alone, must have been reading aloud. It is a mark of simplicity and earnestness. Like Jacob in a similar solitude, this man wrestled with the Angel of the covenant. The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the King loves to feel the violent pressing with all his might at the gate.

This reading aloud also gave Philip a natural and easy opportunity of introducing himself: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" A very suggestive question, by the way, and very suitable in our own times. To read the Scriptures is a duty and a privilege, but it is only a means to an end. If the ground do not take in the seed, the seed left on the surface is soon carried away.

Winning Individuals

BY REV. B. J. GIBBON.

"Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."—*Acts viii. 29.*

The subject is, Individual effort to win individuals for Jesus Christ. The chapter is mainly occupied with the evangelistic efforts of Philip. In the earlier part we read of a wonderfully successful mission he conducted in Samaria. In the latter part we have an account of his personal dealing with the Ethiopian eunuch, which resulted in the conversion and baptism of that great man. And this instance of work for an individual is described with much greater minuteness than the mission in the crowded city, and the account of it occupies more than one and a half times as much space as the record of the other.

Great prominence is given throughout the Gospel to work for individuals. The value of a single soul, the incalculable preciousness of personality, was a keynote in the teaching of Jesus Christ. He spoke of a shepherd leaving his well-folded ninety and nine sheep and going into the wilderness to find the *one* that had gone astray, and of a woman discontented with her nine pieces of silver and searching diligently for the *one* that she had lost. What He preached He also practised. A single human spirit, whether of cultured scholar or common and coarse woman, was to Jesus Christ supremely worth saving, and He never lost an opportunity to win it. His first disciples also illustrate our principle. Andrew, on finding Christ, went and brought his brother Simon. John brought his brother James. "Philip findeth Nathanael." By individual effort to bring individuals, the first ring of disciples was formed.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency among us to despise individuals. I am afraid it is a characteristic of our time. Men want to regenerate society *en bloc*, instead of man by man—to run up the Eternal City a wall at a time, instead of in the old and sure way of stone by stone. But that is a wider subject, into which we cannot now enter. In spiritual work we are impatient of attempts to win individuals. We admire the Psalmist when he says, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation," and, if we had the ability and opportunity, we would gladly imitate him. But to speak quietly of that righteousness and loving-kindness to a single hearer never occurs to us. We admire the successful teacher, surrounded by a large circle of young men or young women, whose opening lives are being wisely and graciously moulded by his hands, and we would be happy to do such work if we could. But to try to give a single acquaintance of ours an impulse Heavenward has never suggested itself to our minds. If the Master had bid us do some *great* thing, would we not have done it? Most willingly! Most cheerfully! But because we have not the opportunity or the ability to influence great masses for Jesus Christ, we conclude, with regret, that we are not called to Christian service. It is a profound mistake. We are plainly called to the quieter, equally honourable, and—if it were not wrong for any but God to make such comparisons, I would say—more important work of trying to win individuals.

Do not under-rate this service. There is none more remunerative. I believe that all the sermons ever preached have not brought so many to the Saviour's pierced feet as a mother's voice to her child, a brother's voice to his brother or sister, a friend's voice to her friend or acquaintance, and a stranger's voice to a fellow-man— in all of which the voice of the Good Shepherd has been heard, calling His own sheep *by name*.

You may or may not be able to influence numbers, but every one of us has it in his or her power to try to win one or two individuals for the service of the Master we love. Who will say, "By God's grace I, for my part, will take up this work, to which I plainly see all Christ's people are called. I will set myself to try to bring one person to Christ, and when I have succeeded, I will try again"? If every member of our Church would adopt this resolution, how greatly might the Kingdom of Christ be extended!

Well, there are some hints for our procedure in the text. "*The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*" I do not believe in promiscuously and indiscriminately challenging people to say whether or not they are saved. I fear that harm has often been done by such rough, unconsidered—although well meant—efforts. I hold that, for the difficult and delicate work of approaching individuals upon religious matters, we need the distinct guidance of the Holy Spirit. But I also believe that, when that guidance is desired, when the believer is surrendered to Christ to be used as He wills, when the soul says, "Lord, I am willing to speak a word for Thee, if Thou wilt show me when and where," the impulse will be communicated, often and unmistakably. And when it is felt, when the Spirit says, "Go, speak," obey! Do not hesitate, do not doubt. Obey!

Philip gives us an example of *tact*. The eunuch was reading aloud, and the evangelist opened the conversation—more politely than our version suggests—by a reference to the subject. Great tact is needed in dealing with the souls of men. We are to *win* souls. We are to be *fishers* of men. But, to the tactful Christian, many opportunities will open—in railway travelling, in the ordinary intercourse of life—to bring about a conversation upon the theme of Jesus Christ.

It is noticeable that Philip was *not speaking to one beneath him*. It is so easy to talk religion to those who, in some respect, are beneath us—not so well off, weaker in body, less educated, younger. A man finds it easier to speak of Jesus Christ to a beggar than to his partner in business; a woman to her child than to her friend. This is why we have to talk of "the neglected rich"—because rich Christians find it pleasanter to go "slumming" in the East End, and preach in mission halls, than to address members of their own class. But this spirit is a wrong one. It is inspired by a love of the consciousness of superiority and a taste for condescension, which are to be condemned. Certain it is that no class of people will ever be saved by effort from without. The heathen will never be converted by white missionaries: it can only be done by raising up native evangelists. If the working classes are to be saved, it must be by the efforts of Christian working men and women. So, whatever other mission we may or may not have, let us be very sure of this, that we have a mission to our own class—by which I mean to the people immediately about us; to the people situated as we are; to the people who are educated like ourselves, or uneducated like ourselves; to the people prosperous as we are, or poor as we are. The Apostles had to begin at Jerusalem—at home—in their preaching of the Gospel, and, earlier still, two of them first found their own brothers and brought them to the Saviour.

Now, why is it that not more Christian people are surrendered up to Christ for this service, the service of speaking to individuals, and individuals like themselves, on His behalf? The lepers outside the gate of Samaria, who discovered unimagined plenty in the empty Syrian camp while the people within the walls were starving, said: "We do not well . . . to hold our peace." Are we doing well in refraining from telling friends and neighbours and strangers within our gates of Him Who is the Bread of Heaven and Water of Life, and Who "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness"? Strangest of all is it that some who are tongue-tied boast of the fact. They claim that their reverence for spiritual things is too great to allow them to make such the theme of conversation. They cannot speak of Christ and what He has done for their souls to strangers, or even to friends, so extreme is their spiritual delicacy and sensitiveness. The short and sufficient answer to these is: If all Christian people were like you, Christianity would become extinct with the present generation. No; this reluctance to speak is not praiseworthy, but the opposite. We find it difficult to talk of Christ because—shall I say it?—the subject is not so familiar to us as it might be, seeing that we do not speak to Him so much as we should. "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*" Let us have frequent heart-to-heart communion with our Saviour, and our experience will be that of the Psalmist, "My heart bubbleth up with a goodly matter," and of the Apostles, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

The plain reason why we should all try by personal effort to win others to Christ is that *He relies for a Church in the next generation upon the testimony of the Church of to-day*. Each Christian must, on an average, gain one other if the Church is to be maintained, and more than one if God's will is to be accomplished and the Church increased. "Brethren, we are debtors." We are debtors to the past. We owe it to the unbroken testimony of all the previous generations since Christ that we are in the faith. And we are debtors to the future. We owe it to succeeding generations to pass on the inheritance we have received. Sometimes a nobleman, heir to a vast estate and an ancient name, whose ancestors have held the property before him for centuries, will mourn that Heaven has denied him a son to carry on the great tradition, so that the family will die out, the honoured name perish, and the estate pass into the hands of the stranger at his death. But we, who are Christ's people, are in a more splendid succession. Our spiritual ancestry goes back, through some faithful man or woman in each generation, to the Apostles, and, through them, to the Lord Himself. Shall the grace that has flowed so long die with you, a barren Christian; or will you, by seeking to become the spiritual parent of another, still pass it on? Will you be the last link in the chain that extends so far; or will you, by trying to add another link, do your part to continue it until Christ comes? "I am the Vine," says the Master; "ye are the branches." Centuries have passed, and the multiplication of the branches and consequent ramifications of the Vine have been endless. We, the believers of to-day, are the last branches that have yet appeared. Shall the Vine cease to grow with us; or shall we, by sending on the vital sap, the Christ-life that is in us, add other branches, and so carry on the splendid growth? Win another for Christ, and you do not know what the end will be. There may be no end until Christ comes.

At the time of the Reformation there was a preacher at Cambridge named Chaderton. One of his converts, Culverwell by name, became a preacher in turn, and was the means of the conversion of one John Winthrop, who afterwards became famous as Governor Winthrop. Another of Chaderton's converts

was William Perkins, who also became a preacher. Two of his converts were John Cotton, of Boston, and John Robinson, the Pilgrim Father. Now, Governor Winthrop, John Cotton, of Boston, and John Robinson, the Pilgrim Father, were among the chief of those who laid the splendid Puritan foundations of the United States, so that the great Christian commonwealth across the Atlantic is largely the indirect fruit of the work of the Cambridge preacher named Chaderton. O, carry on the faith one step further, win one individual for Christ, and you do not know what the end will be. There may be, I say, no end until He comes back again.

The Relations between Holy Scripture and the Church

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

“ Philip ran thither to him,” &c.—Acts viii. 30, 31.

St. Philip's interview with the Ethiopian is the first recorded specimen of a private ministration of the Gospel. In this view of it, it teaches how such ministrations should be conducted, and makes a suggestion respecting that difficult point, the method of opening them. The evangelist took occasion from the Ethiopian's occupation to put a question to him. And this question led on to a conversation in which the minister of God had the opportunity of placing before this foreigner all the leading points of the Christian faith. St. Philip fell in, not only with the eunuch, but with the train of thought which the eunuch's mind was pursuing; and thus succeeded in entangling this great fish in the meshes of the Gospel net.

It is surprising (as those well know who are in the habit of private religious intercourse with others) how many good words, how many true and Scriptural words, utterly fail to take hold of the mind of particular persons—fall altogether dead upon their mental ear, because they are not in the state which requires that particular counsel. One soul requires to be convinced of sin, and to be shown the danger of its own insensibility; another has got far beyond this, has long begun the spiritual life, and is striving after a high measure of sanctity; a third is involved in some semi-intellectual difficulty; another, under a high religious profession, which deceives himself even more than it imposes on his neighbours, is hugging some sin to his heart; another is harassed with scruples of conscience, and fast becoming morbid; another, of unimpeachable outward conduct, is approaching religion with his thoughts rather than his conscience, and beginning to find in it very serious speculative difficulties. Now, as physicians tell us that there is for every form of disorder some one specific in the natural world, so somewhere in the field of God's Word there is a specific for every spiritual malady. If the right specific is offered to an individual, he appropriates it; it is what his conscience requires. But if a specific be offered him for a complaint not at that moment his, no effect is produced, not because the specific has lost its virtue, but because there is no correspondence between it and the state of the patient. Now, in order to offer to men such spiritual remedies as shall meet their case, we must study the direction which their thoughts are taking. And when we come upon them off their guard, and observe how they are occupied, their occupation will often be a clue to their thoughts. The Ethiopian, when Philip accosted him, was reading the Scriptures with earnestness, doubtless as

if he took a pleasure in reading them. This showed the person with whom the evangelist was so called to deal, to be a religiously-minded and good man. What followed brought out two other points—his docility and willingness to be enlightened by anyone who seemed superior to himself in religious attainment, and his ignorance of many vital points. The Ethiopian was a type of that large class of souls, in whom there is some unction and fervour of spirit, without much intelligence. They are simple souls, and take delight in what is good, and are never wearied by religious ordinance, nor ever think they can have too much of it; but the heart has outrun the mind in their religion (infinitely better extreme than that the mind should outrun the heart); they need light, and are honestly willing to receive it from whatever quarter it shines upon them. Such was the Ethiopian; and his character unfolded itself as such to Philip, from his occupations and his observations. Philip was guided by Divine Providence and by the turn of his hearer's mind (which turn had been given to it by the Divine Spirit) to speak as he did. Under such guidance he could not fail to speak a word in due season.

Our Lord, in sending forth His seventy disciples to preach the Kingdom of God, had given them this pregnant direction: "Salute no man by the way." He had charged them with a most grave and serious mission; and they were not to allow even the ordinary courtesies of life to distract them from the execution of it. In the common intercourse of society men begin with trifles and common-place greetings before they pass to topics of importance. But trifles do not befit the character of those who go straight from the face of God to convey His messages to man. We find Philip here acting on the very letter of our Lord's precept. God's Angel had expressly directed him to take the journey on which he met the eunuch. And when the eunuch appeared, he had received an intimation from God's Spirit to join him. He does not, therefore, open the conversation by saluting the man to whom he was sent. He does not make a remark to him on the state of the weather or of the crops; but begins at once with the business of his mission: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" There must have been something striking to the Ethiopian in this first question of St. Philip. Abrupt it was, when judged by the standard of the world's manners: but the very reverse of abrupt, it was continuous and pertinent, as addressed to his state of mind. It exactly chimed in with the course his thoughts were taking, and thus did not seem strange to him or out of place. His mind was exercised deeply upon the Scripture he was reading, and this man seemed (as indeed he was) the messenger of God come to resolve his difficulties. He has no hesitation, therefore, in inviting him to come up into the chariot. Alas! that our thoughts, unlike those of this simple African, should be exercised so much upon the world and secular things, that spiritual remarks seem to us an inconvenience and intrusion. We live (except just when we pray) in a world of thought from which God and Christ are banished; and thus the sudden intrusion into conversation of the subject of religion strikes us as a want of tact on the part of the person making it. It pieces ill with the state of mind habitual to us, and into which we relapse as soon as we quit our devotions.

And now our narrative opens up a most curious and interesting question, which has divided opinion in all ages of the Church, and into the bearings of which we must strive to get some clear insight. The Ethiopian had the Scriptures in his hand. But he modestly professes an inability to understand them without some expositor. St. Philip appears as such an expositor, and opens his mind to the true significance of what had perplexed him. Here then for the first time, in this challenge of St. Philip, and this artless reply of the eunuch,

is brought before us the great subject of the relations subsisting between the Church and the Holy Scripture.

"How can I understand what I read, except some man should guide me?" Intending to express nothing more than the sentiment of the moment, the Ethiopian here gives utterance to a great principle. The Holy Scriptures are the Church's Law, both as to precept and doctrine. They contain, without the slightest admixture of error, all articles of Faith, and all principles of Christian Duty. They are given by Inspiration of God, a phrase which means (at all events) thus much—that however much the human mind may have been used as an instrument in giving them, they were not suggested or originated by the human mind, which is the case with uninspired books. Moreover, in a very important sense (which should always be borne in mind in forming views of this subject) the Church stands upon Holy Scripture. To Scripture the Church must point for her charter; if the Church is to explain what she is, how she originated, on what grounds she claims our deference, she must evidently go to the Bible for it. Suppose, for instance, that this Book of the Acts of the Apostles did not exist, and that our Lord's commission and instructions to His Apostles were not found in the Gospels, the Church would in that case have her ground cut away from under her. What the Church is, what are her functions and what her constitution, can only be known from these parts of Scripture; the Church has no pretensions, no vouchers for her authority, but what is contained in the Bible. In this point of view, then, Scripture is altogether paramount to the Church, and *prior in order of thought*. I am not cognizant of the existence of such a body as the Church, but from the Acts and parts of the Gospels. I must think, therefore, first of these portions of Scripture before I can arrive at any ideas about the Church.

Yet, although the Scriptures are prior to the Church *in order of thought*, it is equally evident that the Church is prior to the Scriptures *in order of time*.

The Church existed before there were any Scriptures; and, moreover, each individual soul among us must, by the necessity of the case, be addressed by the Church before he can be addressed by the Scriptures. First, the Church existed before there were any Scriptures. No Book of the Old Testament was written before Moses, and yet from the time of Abel onward there were believers in the world who supported upon the promise of the Seed of the woman a spiritual hope, and who made a protest by their conduct against idolatry and unrighteousness. No Book of the New Testament had been composed at the time of the Ethiopian's conversion, yet there was a most flourishing Church at Jerusalem, dowered with the gifts, as well as the graces, of the Spirit, officered by Apostles and Deacons, and reproving the miserable divisions of modern Churches by exhibiting a multitude of believers "of one heart and of one mind." And each one of us, as we come into the world, is approached by the Church with the offer of grace and mercy before he can be approached by the Scriptures. It is the Church of our day which takes us in her arms, in the day of life, and offers us to Christ in Baptism. That is the theory and principle (though very little understood) on which godparents, and not parents, act for the child in Baptism; the godparents represent the Christian Society, whereas the parents only represent natural interest in the child: the godparents are to the child the Church of the day, which takes him up and solemnly dedicates him to God. Again, the religious teacher (be it mother or guardian, or tutor) acts as a representative of the Church. And observe how this teacher necessarily goes to work. The child is taught its religion by Catechisms—short summaries, that is, of faith and practice, compiled by the Christian Society to which he belongs,

but gathered out of Holy Scripture, and proved by it. To suppose that a child, even when bordering on the age of an adult, could gather for itself the main points of the Faith (the doctrine, for instance, of the Trinity, of the Atonement, or the Sacraments) out of the Holy Scriptures, would be so wild an hypothesis that no one in his sound senses ever made it. Nay, why do I speak of a child? Suppose a fully grown man, competently educated on secular subjects—does anyone really believe that if his mind had been left a blank on religious subjects till the age, say, of twenty-five, and if then he had been set down with a Bible, to make out the articles of the Faith for himself, he could have made them out? Would not such a mind flounder about hopelessly in the absence of all first principles, not knowing to what quarter of the field of Scripture first to address itself? The materials, out of which the Creeds are constructed, are doubtless within that man's reach; but how many years would he take (supposing him to be absolutely devoid of the rudiments of religious knowledge) in constructing the Creed out of the materials! No! to attain knowledge on any subject in this manner is chimerical. No man ever did, or ever will, attain knowledge so. The mind must proceed in the first instance upon human authority; it can understand nothing, except some man take it by the hand and guide it. But in after days, having been imbued with the Faith in childhood—having had its memory charged with sound formularies, and its sympathies enlisted on the side of Christian Doctrine, it can doubtless recognise the Faith in Holy Scripture, and see how it may be conclusively proved thereby. This comparison of the Creeds, and of the Articles of our own Church, with the Holy Scripture (the alone source of true doctrine and right principles of conduct) should no doubt be made, after prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, by every individual who is competent to make it. It is not only his privilege and his right to conduct such an inquiry, it is his solemn responsibility to do so, and to do it with all candour and seriousness. The Bible can be to none of us the *original teacher* of Truth. Nor can any of us understand the Bible without a previous education in Divine Truth. But it is to all of us the great *criterion* of Truth. And we must not shrink from the duty of testing by this infallible criterion what we receive at first upon human authority.

We have no fear whatever that the views of the Church of England, as expressed in her Articles, much less that the Catholic Faith, as expressed in the Nicene Creed, will be shaken by this appeal, wherever it is made modestly and in the spirit of earnest prayer. Yet, as regards lesser points of religious belief, and those upon which two opinions may be formed by persons substantially agreed as to the main points, a word of caution needs to be added. Correct conclusions upon these are scarcely likely to be arrived at, if we discard the illustrative commentary drawn from the usages and known sentiments of the primitive Church. This commentary often develops what is found in Scripture in the shape of an obscure hint. Take the case of Infant Baptism. There are passages from which it may be inferred that it is conformable to the mind of Christ to baptise infants: but anyone who should say that from the Bible alone the question of Infant Baptism can be entirely set at rest, would surely place a greater strain upon the passages in question than in fairness they can be made to bear. But if you will allow the usages and sentiments of the primitive Church, as attested by the earliest Fathers, to be any evidence of what the Apostolic practice was—if you will read the Scriptural passages bearing upon the subject in the light thrown upon them by the writings of those Christians who lived nearest to Apostolic days—if you believe that certain practices which are found universally prevalent in the second and third centuries, must have had some

sanction in the teaching or example of the Apostles, then the evidence in favour of Infant Baptism becomes so strong that it is impossible for any reasonable man to resist it. And in this manner the Church represented by her earliest doctors may often bring out the significance of what in Scripture is merely a pregnant hint, and enable us fully to understand what we read there.

The relations which the Church bears to Holy Scripture have been well illustrated by those which exist between the judicial and the legislative power in the State. A judge in this country has no authority whatever to make the law. The law is made by the three estates of the realm assembled in Parliament, and the judge's part is simply the subordinate one of interpreting and administering it, of expounding what it is, and applying it to the particular cases which fall under his jurisdiction. I may add, on the one hand, that the judge himself is as much under the law, as entirely obliged to observe it in his own person, as those who are tried before him; that the law is supreme over all, over those who administer it as much as over any other subjects—nay, even over the Sovereign himself, who is bound to govern according to the Constitution; and on the other, that juries, whose part it is to give the critical verdict on which the course of law depends, would more often than not go wrong in their decisions, unless the judge, who is the law's authorised expositor, directed them as to the principles which must rule their verdict. Well, the Holy Scriptures are the Law; the Church is the Judge; and the individual soul, who must, in the exercise of his own conscience and reason, form for himself his religious opinions, is the Jury. The Holy Scriptures are the Church's Law; they emanate from God Himself, than Whom no authority can be higher; they are above all, and they have a right to control all; they are perfect; no human authority, not even an assembly of all the wisest and best prelates in the world, could venture, without blasphemy, to add anything to them, or subtract anything from them.

But in interpreting these Holy Scriptures, in seeking to understand them aright, the individual soul needs help, needs the guidance of the Church, who is the witness, keeper, and expositor of Holy Writ. If he rejects this guidance he rejects one great aid which God has given him for arriving at a right conclusion. Nay, more; he kicks down, as many do, the ladder by which he himself has risen to that knowledge of Divine Truth, which he at present possesses. Whence did he derive those rudiments of religion upon which every higher stage of religious knowledge must be built? Where did he obtain his Creeds, which contain an outline of all essential truth? He obtained them from the Church, or Christian Society, which has drawn them up, handed them down, and at length has lodged them in his hands. Whence his intimate conviction that these Creeds are substantially true, and the horror he would feel if his faith were shaken in any article of them? This arises from his having been submitted to a Christian education, which has fostered the grace imparted to him in his Baptism. And his Baptism was given him by the Church of his day. Surely this is enough to establish the Church's claim upon his veneration and respect. And yet, should the Church, as any particular local branch of it might do, impose new Articles of Faith and new terms of Communion, he must, at the risk of all that he holds most dear, break with such a society. Whenever the judge imposes new laws, it is high time to side with the law against the judge.

I cannot but remark, in conclusion, that we are favoured indeed who have such a commentary upon the Holy Scriptures as the Book of Common Prayer. We may not have learning or leisure to study Church history; it may not be possible for us to make ourselves acquainted with the writings of Fathers, or the Decrees of Councils. But here, in the Book of Common Prayer, we have

a plain and compendious guide to the understanding of Holy Scripture, which will very often (if we consult it) resolve a difficult question, and put some point of religious opinion, if not in a new, yet in a true light. Do we ever use the Prayer Book thus? If we did so habitually, we should find many moot points, raised in these days of controversy, settled for us, and settled, I do not hesitate to say, with so much candour and so much guardedness from dangers on opposite sides as would at once approve itself to our minds as the *true* settlement of the question. Remember that substantially the Prayer Book is a treasure which has descended to us from the purest and most primitive ages of the Church. Remember that it received its present shape from men, on whose mind Gospel light had dawned after a long period of darkness and superstition, yet from men of ripe theological learning, who were profoundly versed in the history and writings of the early Church, and still more in the study of Holy Scripture. And then judge of the immense aid which such a book is likely to afford towards the understanding of the Scriptures, and let it serve to you, wherever God's Word is obscure or doubtful, to explain and illustrate it.

The Seed Sown and the Harvest Reaped

BY REV WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"*Philip ran thither to him,*" &c.—*Acts viii.* 30, 31.

Sometimes a sermon is reported and published word for word in full. At other times the report gives, in a more or less condensed form, the substance of the discourse. We possess a report of Philip's discourse delivered that day in the desert to a solitary listener, but it is in an abbreviated form. It is the briefest report of a sermon that I ever saw; and yet it is the most complete. It is a wonderful example of much in little. "He preached unto him Jesus." One precious word expresses the doctrine which the evangelist taught: that word is "Jesus." The matter of the sermon lies all in that one blessed name. But even that is not enough. The saving doctrine contained in this name was pressed on the heart and conscience of the hearer. It was not only Jesus; but Jesus unto him, then and there.

It is perhaps at this latter point that most of our preaching fails. There is much sound exposition. All that is implied in the name Jesus, is exhibited skilfully and faithfully before the multitude. But the ministry often halts for want of courage to press Jesus upon the conscience of every man. The outspread sun-rays make all the ground bright; but the concentration of the rays on a spot makes that spot burn. Under the skilful preaching of Philip, the Ethiopian felt that Christ Jesus was then offered and pressed upon him the same as if there had not been another man in the world, the same as if the Son of God had come for the single purpose of redeeming him from sin, and leading him into holy rest.

While preaching depends effectually on the demonstration of the Spirit, it depends subordinately and instrumentally on the pointed application of the Gospel method to the heart of the listener as if he were the only listener, and as if the Lord from Heaven stood before him demanding an immediate answer. This home preaching took instant effect. The Ethiopian understood the message, and accepted Christ. He believed, was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing.

"He went on his way." He must tread the desert, although he is now a son of God and an heir of glory. He is not instantly carried home. He pursues his journey under the hot sun, and upon the hot sand. When Christ prayed for His

disciples, He said, "I pray . . . that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." The winter is as cold and the summer as warm to Christ's disciples as to other men. They pass through fire and water ; but the Father brings them to a wealthy place at last.

The Ethiopian began that journey before he had found and accepted the Saviour ; and now that he is in Christ a new creature, he does not stop or turn aside. He will complete the journey : when he reaches home he will do homage to his sovereign, enter his office, examine his books, give audience to his subordinates, and generally attend to all the duties of his high office in the kingdom.

Here is a useful lesson for Christians of all ranks and in all times. If your business was lawful and honest before, you need not desert it when you become a Christian. A child at school, a servant in the house, a clerk in the counting-room, a labourer in the field, a mechanic in the workshop, a seaman before the mast, a merchant in the exchange, need not desert his calling when he enters a new life of faith.

Some people indeed must abandon their calling when they come to Christ. If the business has been sinful and injurious, the man will not remain in it an hour after he has become a new creature. Those fortune-tellers who haunted the precincts of the temple at Ephesus gave up their trade as soon as they believed. They came to the Apostles to confess their wickedness and to burn their books. They gave up their trade and their stock in trade because, as soon as their minds were enlightened, they perceived that they were involved in an occupation which offended God and injured men. This becomes a test of truth in men, and an instrument of glory to God. Many a mischievous business has been abandoned and many an unjust gain abjured, when the eyes of an evildoer's understanding have been enlightened and his heart made new.

But this Ethiopian gentleman would probably do more good by going home and conducting his business, than if he had abandoned his office and followed Philip northward. The Lord has need of witnesses everywhere, in schools and workshops, in families, in evening parties, in halls of judgment and legislation, in the army, and in ships at sea. Everywhere the earth is corrupt and needs salt. Every true Christian is a grain of salt ; and for the world's good the salt must be distributed, so as to be in contact with evil at every point. It behoves every disciple to have always his savour in him, for he does not know how soon and how often the Lord may have need of him as a witness to truth.

Lessons from the Desert Ways

BY REV. MORGAN DIX, D.D.

"Philip . . . heard him read the prophet Esaias," &c.—Acts viii. 30, 31.

Philip the deacon had been sent down toward the south, unto the way that goeth from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. The Angel had spoken, and he arose, and went, not knowing whither. It is our duty to listen for the voice of God, and obey at once. This deacon of Christ's Church was the counterpart of Balaam of old, and of Jonah the reluctant prophet ; he turned his face immediately toward the wilderness and the solitary place. He might have raised questions about this order. To whom should he preach when he got there ? Why be sent to a solitude ? Why be thus banished and exiled ? Might not one be more useful in Jerusalem ? Did not that city present a wider field to zeal and talents ? Shall a man be asked to bury his gifts, his abilities, and him-

self in a desert? Thus the worldly-minded would demur. But the speech of faith and obedience is of another tone. If God set a man far off from his choice and preference, that is no concern of the servant, whose simple thought is to do the Master's will. Philip was called to the desert; he asked no question why, but down to the desert he went.

Now God sees all parts of the world at once, and has His reason for every act. And He had sent Philip to intercept another man. Thus are we brought mysteriously together, and thus are inwoven the strands of lives. We know not at the time; afterwards we see why certain things were ordered as they were; we can trace the influence of mind on mind, of life on life. Even so, Philip found that the desert was not empty. While walking on he heard a voice; it was that of someone reading aloud; and as the sound became clearer, he saw what seemed to be a chariot approaching, and one seated in it; and his was the voice which had been heard.

Strange indeed were the preparations for the Gospel in the heathen world. Here is an instance to the point; men were feeling after Christ, in the unsatisfied hunger of the soul. This man had been at Jerusalem; he had gone there to worship God: and now, returning, he sat in his chariot and read the Holy Scriptures. Surely he was meek and lowly at heart. Whatever impression that equipage may have made on Philip as he looked, he was greatly in error, if he thought, "Here is probably a haughty man of the world!" Perhaps he thought it of him; we are ever ready to condemn on outward appearances; nay, it is probable that he had some such notion, for it does not seem to have occurred to him that he could have any concern with that great man, till the Spirit said, "Go, join thyself to yonder chariot." Thus do appearances deceive. The humble and meek may be in kings' courts; under the robe of wealth and state may beat a heart uncorrupt before God. This person, for example, had the charge of vast earthly treasure; and yet his thoughts are far away; he is meekly reading the Word of life, and seeking the pearl of great price. It is the cheap and contemptible art of the demagogue to rail against the rich. Remember, a rich man of Arimathea was deemed worthy to receive the Body of Jesus Christ; nor is the Heavenly City less pure and holy because the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it.

But Philip went—he ran, he went with alacrity, forward to do his duty when he saw the way. And he discerned the place of the reading, and knew its solemn application; yet doubted whether the reader understood. He himself had not until recently apprehended the meaning of those words; so might it be with others. And therefore he asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And the eunuch replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?"

The answer shows the character of the man; it commends him, not to approval—that is too cold a term—to affection and love. He spoke like an earnest, honest seeker after truth. Who was this traveller on foot, who, running towards the chariot, interrupted his reading and taxed him with lack of knowledge? How abrupt, how offensive the speech! Why not bid his servants drive the fellow away? There may have been, in Philip's dress, what told his sacred office. But that is most unlikely; nor is the supposition necessary. Enough that the question was put, not to a conceited spirit, puffed up with pride, but to a pure, humble, candid mind. This man of Ethiopia felt his influence while he read. He hoped for light; yet, though he had it not, he read on. When asked a plain question, he told the plain truth. He was not like them that are wise in their own eyes; he was not one of those who think they know everything, or can find it out unhelped; he did not count himself to have apprehended

even the written Word of God, so long as there were helps yet unused to ascertain its meaning. He felt his need of instruction ; if this unknown and insignificant stranger could teach him, he was not above learning from him. This is the ground on which it is not toil, but luxury, to sow the seed of the word of life : the harvest and the reaping are sure. And it seems a good and pleasant thing that this docile soul read on, and still read, though all was mysterious and obscure. Take the lesson to thyself. Read thou God's blessed Word, and in due time He will make it clear. Cease not to read, because thou dost not comprehend. It is good to hear the voice of young children as they read aloud from the Bible. It is good to hear young children, even very young children, repeat the Creed. They do not understand : what of that ? In time they will ; but let them learn these words now, and so read on. The very words have power to purify the air and comfort the listener : the sound of the voice, reciting the inspired sayings of the Holy Ghost, invites the very Angels to hearken. So this man read aloud, humble as a little child. God were not God if He had not attended to the cadence of that measured voice which broke the stillness of the desert land.

And now the light is dawning, and soon to shine full into that soul already prepared for the dayspring from on high. " And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him " ; and so they rode on together, and the reading was resumed. On what was he engaged ? Was he reading about the days of creation and the morning of the world ? Was he reading the story of Abraham and the patriarchs, the acts of the Judges, or the wars of the Kings ? Nay : but he was reading that which stirs the Christian spirit to the depths, and is associated with whatever is most sacred and dearest in our faith. If one of us, the household of the Lord, were asked to turn to the most solemn, the most affecting, the most precious chapter of the Old Testament, I think we should find no difficulty in the choice. Even now the heart beats, and the eyes grow moist, on recalling what passage it was, which the poor Gentile child of God was so patiently trying to study out. " He was led as a sheep to the slaughter," &c. O words most wondrous, most divine ! Understandest thou what thou readest, O stranger and pilgrim here ? Whosoever thou be, to-day, or any day, that readest, hast thou ever yet taken in the mystery that meets us here ? Familiar as they are to us, often as we have heard them, or meditated on them before the Cross, now little do we comprehend, as yet, of this which leaves the reason and the imagination far behind ! " I pray thee," he asks, " of whom speaketh the Prophet this ? Of himself, or of some other man ? " Neither of himself ; nor yet of some other man. Of whom then ? The human reason hath no answer for that question. There was no answer from the wilderness and the solitary place ; nature hath no answer ; science, none ; philosophy, none. We are far away from finite bounds and natural limits. There was, perchance, no immediate reply from the minister of the Church : he may have bowed his head, a little while, in awe and adoration, discerning the end of the mission on which he had been sent. For a space there was silence, ere he broke the seal. And then " he opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." For this name answers the question of the eunuch, the question of everyone who would know the life, the truth, and the way, the desire of every earnest spirit. " Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world."

There are points, on the journey through life, at which one is fain to stop and look at what is before him, fixed, motionless, and satisfied, though hours should pass by. It is so with this scene ; nere one might forget the world and

its concerns, and realise the meaning of the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come!" Who would not have been there, with Philip, that he might have drawn near to the chariot; and walked beside it, listening to the disciple as he read, and to the teacher as he gave the sense of the words? As for those words, what less can be said than this, adapting to the occasion another exquisite passage of that same Prophet, that "the wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them, and the desert did rejoice and went nigh to blossom as the rose"? For then the eyes of the blind were opened, and the ears of the deaf were unstopped. And the highway by which they two went together might well have been called the way of holiness: it was for those two, of a truth; the wayfaring man erred no longer therein. There also did the parched land become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; and in that wilderness, presently, did sacramental waters break out, for the baptism of him, who went down into the stream and laver of regeneration in the desert.

"Philip preached unto him the Lord Jesus." What does such preaching include? Many things; a system ordered above for our advantage; a complete circle of statements of the cause, manner, and instruments of human salvation; the object of faith, the acts required of faith, the means by which faith is enabled to do her perfect work. For "as they went on their journey, they came to a certain water": it was, no doubt, some well-known road-side spring or living fountain, shaded by trees, and resorted to by travellers for refreshment and repose. And at once, on seeing it, the eunuch cried, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?" Is there not much to be learned from that request? What could he have known about baptism? Why, when he saw the water, did he immediately allude to the first of the Sacraments of the Gospel, and ask that he might receive it without delay? Had he learned already to "believe in one baptism for the remission of sins"? He must have done so; he must have learned it from Philip; and the statement of the need and efficacy of Holy Baptism must therefore be an original part of the true preaching of Jesus Christ. Now this is most important to consider, when men make light of the ordinances and institutions of Christianity, and think them unnecessary, and speak of them as the inventions of the priesthood for superstitious uses. Not so. Here is a case, within a few days of the Ascension of the Lord and the First Pentecost, where it is as plain as it could be made, that Gospel preaching originally contained a reference to, and an insisting on, external sacramental forms and rites. So are the outer and the inner woven together, in the Holy Church, that each implies and needs the other, and it is sacrilege to part them. He who rightly preaches of the Church does not cease to preach Jesus Christ; he who presents to faith the sacramental system does not thereby diminish ought of the merits and glory of Jesus Christ. Christ is in His Church; Christ is in His appointed institutions; Christ is everything, everywhere, and all in all. And this we may see from cases like the one before us; when a stranger and a Gentile, having heard of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and having learned the power of the Cross, must, at the same time, and in course of the same preaching, have learned the value of the means of grace. The connexion is direct and complete. "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved." To believe is to believe all. The faith which saves, if an intelligent faith, includes belief in the established instrumentalities whereby God works in us. Catholic Faith is not the selfish inner emotion of one mind which thinks its separate act the sum and substance of religion, and the sole condition to acceptance: but that calm and full concurrence in the whole of the grand system devised to lift men out of the evil of this present state, and to give them entire satisfaction in the pledge and promise of their heavenly inheritance.

This story ends, with the entrance, through the door of Holy Baptism into the visible Church. "When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more." It was the day of strange and marvellous things. He disappeared, even as Christ vanished from the sight of the two disciples at Emmaus; as Elijah passed away from his friend, who cried aloud, meanwhile, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Even here is instruction for us. The work of the ministry should have no personal respects. Its object is to bring, not man to man, but the sinner to the Saviour. When that is done, it may be best that personal ties should be severed, lest a pure intention and a perfect work be harmed by lower motive or mere earth-born affections. The work of the ministry shall be proved in the day when all human works shall be tried by fire. O may we meanwhile in naught contribute to bring confusion on our heads, by making self, in some form, our object, and neglecting to do everything to the sole glory of God!

Let us not omit, from time to time, to recall the scene which has now occupied our thoughts. Though it fade from the view, let its many teachings abide with us. They pass on, those two travellers; the sound of the voices, the music of the words, grow faint and fainter in the distance; the chariot, the equipage, the attendants recede, and become mere specks far away on the dim horizon, till like a vision and a dream they vanish altogether. But we may stand, as it were, in the spot where they passed us by, and recall what one would fix in the memory for the rest of his days. And since life is but a journey, and we but strangers and pilgrims here, let us greatly desire that messengers may meet us, with good words, as we fare onward; that they may find us at all times ready to be taught and deeply intent on the great themes of religion. And although to some, the way may seem like "Gaza which is desert," while winds of divers and strange doctrines blow about their ears, and shifting sands conceal the road, yet to patience, to faith, to humility, God shall send abundant reward, and above all other sounds shall be heard the voice of the Spirit, bidding them search the Scriptures, and showing them, as the beginning and the end, that Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world.

Philip and the Ethiopian

BY REV. JOHN BAINES, M.A.

"Understandest thou what thou readest?" &c.—*Acts viii.* 30, 31

1. We have a sketch of the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Christ in its earliest days. We notice the distinct office of the ministry and its different orders. The Apostles rule, the Evangelists preach a mission, or remain in a settled congregation. The preaching is on the one theme. To the Samaritans St. Philip preached Christ; to the Ethiopian he preached Jesus. And this preaching Jesus Christ involved and implied teaching and preaching about the holy sacrament of baptism. Sacramental teaching must have formed part of the preaching of "Jesus," else how should the Ethiopian have known of baptism, or when "Jesus" had been preached, said, "Here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptised?" Sacramental teaching must have held a very prominent and important place in apostolic preaching. Some foolish people now-a-days want to draw a distinction between preaching Christ and preaching the Sacraments, showing thereby their utter ignorance of Holy Scripture which knoweth

no such distinction. For if we lay stress on Sacraments, it is because they bring Jesus Christ most vividly before the thoughts of Christians, and because by one of them the soul is brought into communion with, and by the other is kept in communion with the Lord Jesus. The Sacraments would be the merest "beggarly elements," and encourage formalism of the weakest kind, were it not for their uniting us to Jesus, and were not Jesus the sum and substance, the end and the beginning, the "Alpha and Omega" of every sacrament and sacramental rite. From Him they derive their power, to Him they witness, of Him they testify. And so the Church loves them, and values them, and lays stress upon them, and urges their reception now as she did by the mouths of St. Philip and St. Peter more than eighteen hundred years ago. The Church is unchangeable in her doctrine. It is impossible that she can change. Think what changes these eighteen hundred years have seen—how empires have vanished away, and kingdoms succeeded kingdoms in quick succession; how fresh nations have come to the front, how customs, and manners, and languages have altered—"still the Holy Church is here" reciting the same Creed, preaching the same Jesus, baptising "in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," as when Philip in the desert solitude preached to the nobleman of Ethiopia sitting in his chariot, and baptised him in the wayside stream by which they passed. Ever the same unwavering unchangeable, in trust with the same eternal truths, is the Catholic Church of Christ. And so will she be to the end.

2. So again God's ministers may learn as Philip, to go where God's providence calls them, and not to murmur if their lot is cast in "a barren and dry land," or if they find themselves in the way "which is desert," but to seize any opportunity of doing good and making Christ known. Let the call be a lawful one, the journey will be prosperous. God can make even "the wilderness" to be "glad," and "the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose." Philip knew not why he was removed from one sphere of labour which seemed promising to another which seemed unpromising. But he obeyed, and this noble convert was his reward. We may all learn "whatever our hand findeth to do, to do it with our might." Satisfied that God has something for us to do, let us do it and do it cheerfully, though we may see no reasons for the order being given.

3. So, too, may we learn many a useful lesson from the nobleman himself. He was "a man of great authority under Candace Queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure." Now it is clear he must have been a man who had plenty to do: his time must have been fully occupied. His position was a high one. But for all that he did not think himself too important to attend the service of God, or his time so precious that he could not afford to give any of it to God. Even to persons of his rank, travelling was a very different thing to what it is now, and full of difficulties, but they did not deter him from going all the way from Ethiopia "to Jerusalem for to worship," and discharge his duty to God in Whom he professed his belief.

People sometimes think that having much to do, and being much occupied, are excuses, and sufficient excuses for neglecting the duties of religion, whereas the very circumstance of worldly cares pressing upon a man, and the terrible tendency which things of the present have to absorb a man entirely, render it the more imperative, the more worldly business he has, to make a point of keeping alive in his soul the flame of devotion by the constant regular exercise of religious duties. Surely to take a common instance, but one sufficient to illustrate my meaning—the busier a man is in worldly things in the week, and the more his worldly business tends to obscure the world to come, and to centre

all his thoughts in the present, the more precious ought the Lord's Day to be to him, coming as it does with its weekly reminder that "there is a higher world than the present, and a brighter world than that we see."

4. Again, we may learn from this nobleman the spirit in which the Holy Scripture should be studied and read. Holy Scripture is one of God's good gifts to His Church, and as such has always been highly prized and valued by His people. Our own Church we know not only reads in public a considerable quantity of the sacred Volume, but having translated the sacred books into English, places them unreservedly in the hands of her children, and bids them read them. But it is a great mistake to suppose that nothing but the mere reading is requisite to get benefit from the Bible, or to fancy that we shall not find difficulties, or that a man has nothing to do but to put his own interpretation upon difficulties, and that the most ignorant and illiterate man is capable of understanding everything, and is sure to be right. The faith hath once for all been "delivered to the saints," and man is not at liberty to find his religion for himself in the Bible. If he attempts to dispense with the aids which God has given him for the right interpretation of Holy Scripture, he speedily drifts into error. Scripture has its difficulties as the Ethiopian noble found. And St. Peter testifies there are in it "some things hard to be understood," and that there is such a thing as "wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction," just as the very Sacraments themselves may be made a "savour of death."

In this nobleman there was an utter absence of self-conceit, he was not "puffed up by his fleshly mind." He was a learner, and he wanted a living teacher to help him to understand the book. In learning any subject or any language, we need the assistance of the living teacher to interpret the book. Did anyone, for instance, ever learn how to manage a farm or a garden merely from reading a book? However excellent and good the book may be, you always want some one to explain its difficulties. And so the teaching of the Church is the key to unlock the difficulties of the Bible. That teaching we have in the Creeds, in the Sacraments, in the immemorial observances, and unvaried traditions of the Catholic Church. They tell us what Christians have always held the Bible to mean. And woe to us if we wilfully cast away such helps, and trust entirely to our own understanding. We are certain to go wrong. Not such was the temper of this Ethiopian noble. He was glad to read Scripture, but he felt his need of instruction, and gladly welcomed Philip. Had he repelled the assistance of the Evangelist, and said he needed no human instruction to teach him "the way of God in truth" (as some silly people talk now-a-days), he would have missed his opportunity of hearing about Jesus and the great "truths that accompany salvation," and probably remained in comparative darkness all his days. Every help towards understanding God's Word is to be prized by all who wish to understand it aright.

5. And lastly, when he had found Christ and been baptised into His Name, the nobleman "went on his way rejoicing." He had already much that men would say he might rejoice in—he was wealthy, of high position, trusted and honoured by his sovereign. Yet for all this he rejoiced especially as he wended his solitary way homewards a baptised and Christian man. For he saw his instructor no more. He had found "the treasure hid in the field"; "the pearl of great price" was his. Henceforth he could rejoice with "joy unspeakable, and full of glory," for he had "found" the Saviour, and been "found of Him." "Old things had passed away, all things had become new." He was going home with new hopes, new anticipations, new prospects, and bearing to his countrymen a precious gift by the side of which all the treasure of "Candace

Queen of the Ethiopians "paled into insignificance—a treasure "incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away," even the knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Without that knowledge, my brethren, this present life would be dreary, and the prospect hereafter hopeless. But having that knowledge, and letting that knowledge influence our practice, we, too, can go on our way to our heavenly home "rejoicing," even though the way be "desert," and we have to travel it, as it nears the end, like this Ethiopian—alone.

The Conversion and Baptism of the Eunuch

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

*"He desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him," &c.—
Acts viii. 31-36, 38.*

Behold, then, the Evangelist seated side by side with the Ethiopian nobleman in his chariot. And the result of this interview is, that the nobleman is instructed in Christian truth, and brought to Christ. But there is one thing in this result which cannot fail to strike us—the circuitousness of the method by which it was brought about. The eunuch had just visited Jerusalem on an errand of devotion. In God's House, which was to be a house of prayer for all nations, he had stood and had offered his worship; and we know that, nothing daunted by the persecution which arose about Stephen, the Apostles remained still in Jerusalem, and that they frequented the Temple. Why was it not arranged in the order of God's Providence that the eunuch should fall in with one of *them* and receive the truth in that way? But instead of this an Angel is sent to an Evangelist labouring in a distant province, who bids him travel on an unfrequented road in a wild country; and on this unfrequented road he falls in with the eunuch, and converts him to the faith of Christ.

And certainly this arrangement was much more significant than the other would have been of the designs for His Church which God was then unfolding. We have already pointed out that the ministry of the Deacons was the dawn of the ministry of St. Paul. It was characterised by freer, wider, less Judaizing views than those of the original Apostles. God's Church, which had been wrapped at her birth in the swaddling-clothes of Judaism, was to have those swaddling-clothes gradually unwound, and eventually to go free. St. Stephen and St. Philip performed the first part of the unwinding, and this was the stage at which the history of the Church had now arrived. It would therefore have been comparatively inappropriate that the Ethiopian should have received the Gospel in the Holy City, and amid the solemnities of God's worship. Far more conformable was it with the then state of the Christian Dispensation, that the voice which preached Jesus to him should be "a voice crying in the wilderness," the free breezes of which were a sort of symbol of the freedom with which God's Word went forth to the ends of the earth, and proposed itself for the acceptance of all mankind.

This may have been the *reason* of the arrangement. The *practical teaching* of it is obvious. Men may, and often do, find God where they least expect to meet Him. We may sometimes come across Him in the desert, when we have failed to encounter Him at Jerusalem. There is a difference in this respect between the laws of Nature and those of Grace. In Nature the effect is rigidly tied to the means, and never produced except through the instrumentality of the means. Harvests never spring without suns, dews, and rains. Plants never thrive unless the air is freely admitted to them. But we cannot say that

good and saving impressions upon the spirit of man are *limited* to the Ordinances of Grace. We cannot say that a spiritual blessing is to be found nowhere but in Prayer, or in the Study of the Scriptures, or in Public Worship, or in Holy Communion. It is not so. "The wind bloweth where it listeth"; and the Spirit of God is often pleased to act independently of His ordained channels. A casual interview with a stranger, a book read on a journey, some striking incident of Providence or scene of Nature, has often proved a means of grace to a soul, where sermons and sacraments have failed.

The passage of Scripture which the eunuch was reading occurs in the fifty-third chapter of the Prophet Isaiah. There may have been a reason for his pitching upon that part of the Prophetical writings. The Jew divided the Pentateuch into fifty-four sections, one of which was to be read in the synagogue every Sabbath day. During the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, copies of the Law being interdicted, and the reading of it prohibited, they divided the Prophets into fifty-four sections, and substituted a section of these for the usual section of the Pentateuch. Now the section which begins with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah embraces also the fifty-sixth. And in the fifty-sixth we find this promise, which, very possibly, being made to persons in his own circumstances, determined the Ethiopian to choose this particular section: "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people: *neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.* For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, &c.

But whatever motives may have prompted the choice, the text he was engaged upon was one minutely descriptive of the circumstances of our Lord's Passion. The first part of it found its fulfilment in His silence before Pilate, in His meek reply to the man who struck Him for answering the high priest, and generally in the gentle patience of His demeanour through the whole course of His Passion. The latter part of it, which is somewhat obscure, is probably to be understood thus: "In His humiliation His judicial power" (power to execute judgment) "was removed." (When He came to visit us in great humility, He wore not the aspect of Judge; no one would have known from His outward guise and circumstances that God had given Him authority to execute judgment). "But" (though so lowly was His semblance) "who shall declare His generation?" (it is ineffable, for He is the Son of God most high, begotten from everlasting of the Father), "for His life is lifted up from the earth"—not simply taken away, as the life of an ordinary mortal might be, but lifted up from the earth, in reference to the ascending up of Christ to the Right Hand of the Father, where He was before. And thus, humble though His life was in its outward circumstances, its beginning and end were alike inscrutable and ineffable; as He Himself said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go unto the Father." If this be the true meaning of the words, the Ethiopian might well be doubtful to whom they applied. In this view of them they suit none but Christ. On being asked to whom the Prophet alluded, Philip opened his mouth (the regular phrase for leaving the conversational strain, and beginning a solemn and set discourse; thus our Lord is said to have "opened His mouth" in commencing the Sermon on the Mount, and St. Peter to have "opened his mouth" in preaching to Cornelius), and gave him the good news of Jesus, the Saviour, in Whom these words of ancient prophecy were fulfilled. If he followed his text closely, the Articles of the Creed to which he must have given prominence in his discourse, must have been the Divine Sonship of our Lord, His conception of the Holy Ghost, His birth of the

Virgin, His suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and return to judgment—a pretty complete summary of the second paragraph. But there are also Articles in the third paragraph, which he cannot have avoided touching upon. For, first, there is surely a great significance in the name, when we are told that Philip preached, not Christ, the Messiah of the Jews, but “Jesus the personal name of our Blessed Lord, given Him by the Angel Gabriel before His conception, on the ground that He should save His people from their sins. He preached therefore the salvation from sin’s guilt and power, which is in Christ; a salvation which involves, as its first step, the forgiveness of sins through Christ’s Blood. And since he subsequently baptised the eunuch, and Christian Baptism is into the Triune Name, he must also have been explicit with him, one would think, upon the person and office of the Holy Ghost. And thus, scanty as are our materials for conjecturing the course of Philip’s argument—limited, indeed, to the facts that he preached from a certain text, that he preached Jesus, and that immediately after preaching he administered Baptism—so very pregnant are the brief notices of Holy Scripture that we are not much at a loss for the substance of his sermon. It maintained, no doubt, the character of all the sermons recorded in the Book of the Acts, being strictly an announcement of good tidings, of certain facts that had transpired in the history of the world, and of the moral and spiritual significance annexed to them. And it showed, as all these sermons do show, how these facts had occurred on a plan preconceived by the wisdom of God, and how prophecy was fulfilled in the career of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Ethiopian drank in the good news with eager ears, and on their coming to a piece of water, inquired whether there was any objection to his being formally enrolled among the disciples of the new Faith by the Sacrament of Baptism. We know that a certain baptism, or purification by water, was used by the Jews at the admission of proselytes. Acquainted with the Jewish ritual, the eunuch might hence have gathered that a similar rite would be necessary for initiation into the *Christian* Faith; or he might, when in Jerusalem, have heard of baptism as the mode of admission actually practised in the new sect; or much more probably, Philip himself might have woven into his discourse our Lord’s parting command to the disciples, to go “teach all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” “If *all* nations, what doth hinder *me* to be baptised?” the Ethiopian might have thought. “It is true that I belong to a race over which the cloud of God’s malediction lowers. It is true that I am a descendant of Ham, not of Japheth, whom God promised to enlarge, much less of Shem, in whose tents God promised to dwell. Still the commission is ample enough to enclose me within its folds, it was a commission to teach and baptise *all* nations; God, in His good Providence, has already thrown a teacher in my way, who has guided me into the knowledge of His truth. What then doth hinder me from submitting to the second part of His Ordinance, and being baptised?”

Philip making no objection to the Ethiopian’s proposal (what objection was possible? How could there be a moment’s hesitation? Had not God brought him to this spot for the very purpose of admitting this stranger to the Church? Had not his journey been prescribed by an Angel? his interview with the stranger dictated by the Spirit? And was not the appearance of water by the roadside just as the eunuch’s mind had opened to the faith of Christ, a Providential indication of what God would now have him to do?) the driver of the chariot is stopped, and the Evangelist and his illustrious convert descend from it. Then stepping into the water which lay along the roadside, Philip administered the Sacrament of Baptism to this “stranger,” who thus for the second time, and

in a closer and more vital union, was "joined unto the Lord." Eusebius asserts that in his time (the middle of the fourth century) there was a village on the road from Jerusalem to Hebron, at the twentieth milestone, which was said to be the scene of the eunuch's baptism. Jerome (writing more than half a century later) adds that the spring which issued out from the base of the mountain, near this village, was absorbed by the ground in which it rises, a particular about which the earlier writer is silent.

Jesus and the Scriptures

BY REV. G. B. JOHNSON.

"Then Philip opened his mouth," &c.—Acts viii. 35.

Passing by very much in this narrative that is of deep interest, I shall use our text as a happy and significant illustration of the teaching of the Christian preacher and his warrant for it. He preaches Jesus, and his doctrine concerning Jesus lies in the Scriptures. Philip's example was by no means a peculiar one. It did not arise from the accident that the eunuch had the sacred scroll in his hand, nor from any special discrimination or proclivity of Philip. He did only what the rest of the Christian teachers did. Our Lord Himself led the way in this; He gave it out solemnly that He came to "fulfil the Law and the Prophets"; He bade the people search the Scriptures, because they testified of Him; He took the entire volume in His hand, from Moses to Malachi, and expounded and appropriated the multitude of things therein concerning His person and work. This, too, is what Peter did in all his sermons recorded in the Acts; to the concourse at Pentecost, and to the circle in the house of Cornelius, he was ever proclaiming that "to Jesus gave all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him should receive remission of sins." Paul also did this at Damascus, when he elaborated proofs that Jesus was the "very Christ," or Anointed One of ancient Scripture; at Thessalonica, where he "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, Whom I preach unto you, is the Christ": at Corinth, when he "delivered unto them first of all that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." This use of the Scriptures gives coherence and cogency to the instruction and consolation of the Epistles. Nor do any words more justly sum up the great facts of Christianity and set forth their place and power than the familiar declaration, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

I. In Philip's use of Isaiah and other Prophets we see the unity of Scripture displayed. Philip "began at the same Scripture"; he did not care to divert the thought of the eunuch from the scroll of Isaiah, or from the particular paragraph of that scroll. It served him well as a starting-point. Rich was the testimony that lay there; so remarkable, indeed, that out of Jesus there has never appeared man or generation of whom such things could be maintained; so combined in Jesus, in the source, aim, measure, circumstances, spirit, and issue of His suffering and death as to constitute an unassailable identity, so clear, that it has from the first ages been said that in Isaiah we read the narrative of the witness rather than the prediction of the seer. And that "same Scripture," while so eminently illustrious, is only one of many innumerable Scriptures

at which Philip might have begun and by which he might have sustained his proclamation of the Jesus.

The series opened for him with the first book and ended only with the last. In the intermediate books reference continually recurs in words, images, incidents, and institutes that weave into marvellous unity every species of composition, no matter what its occasion, what its style, what its immediate aim. The sentence on man at his fall is mercifully attempered with the promise of the "seed that should bruise the head of the serpent." "Unto Abraham was the Gospel preached"; he "saw the day of Christ and was glad." Jacob announced the "Shiloh unto Whom should the gathering of the people be." Moses celebrated the "Prophet like unto himself"; and Aaron was the administrator of rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, and mediation which had no sense nor efficacy but as shadows and pledges of Jesus. Samuel announced His regal glory; and David sang of Him as "set upon the holy hill of Zion." Micah tells us where He should be born, and Daniel tells us when. Isaiah and Malachi announce His herald, "the voice in the wilderness," and the Prophet "in the spirit and power of Elijah." The gentleness and purity, the righteousness and wisdom, the patience and love of His ministry are the theme of many passages of inimitable beauty, the full lustre of which no one knew till His life accomplished all. The loneliness with which "He trod the wine-press," the scorn and derision, the rage and cruelty of His foes were all written aforetime. The delight of God in Him while yet "He put Him to grief" is conspicuous alike in prophecy and in story. The incidents of His seizure, passion, death, and resurrection are contributed by writers so far apart that they could have held no concert. The royal entry into Jerusalem; the betrayal by the "familiar friend who lifted up his heel against Him," and this for the "goodly price of thirty pieces of silver"; the desertion of the disciples when "the Shepherd was smitten"; the consent unto His death of heathen and Jew together; the violence to both form and spirit of justice as He was hurried from tribunal to tribunal; the scourging, the mocking, the spitting; the parting of His garments and casting lots for the seamless coat; the "numbering with the transgressors"; the gall and vinegar for His thirst; His amazement of horror, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the breaking of never a bone; the grave in the rich man's sepulchre; the resurrection and the ascension to power are all of them pre-delineated. They all of them took place. A mass of conflicting contingencies remaining to this day the most signal proof, in their very multiplicity and diversity, that it was Jesus these Prophets spake of, and none other.

With the aid of these enumerations, which it were easy to extend, I seek to throw your minds back upon the vast whole, and I affirm that there is not a trait of His character, not a purpose of His mission, not a tone of His ministry, not a feature of His lot that holds not its place in the elder Scripture. Jesus is just "He Who was to come." The germ is in the foregoing witness. But, then, what germ ever gave adequate conception of its development? Who from the single kernel ever divined the ear of wheat, its fertility, its symmetry? Who from the bulb ever pencilled the tulip? Even so no antecedent guess could any mortal mind have formed of the glory into which Judaism was to be transfigured in Christ.

How rich the delights of the study of such a Scripture! Piece its parts together into the great whole they compose and see the answer of Jesus to it. Discriminate as best you can the rays of the Sun of Righteousness shining in beauty and majesty. Gladly renew the efforts needful for the clear apprehension of the growth and of the harmonies of this testimony to Jesus. Gather into your

hands, as so many threads, all "the same Scriptures" from which Philip might have pursued his theme, and delightedly gaze on the Pattern into which the New Testament fashions them. Can the charm of their unity be surpassed?

II. In Philip's proclamation of Jesus we see the end of Scripture impressed. Trite, indeed, will the observation seem to some of you that there is in the Scriptures, from first to last, no single topic and no single Person so prominent as redemption from sin and the Redeemer Jesus. Philip struck in with this characteristic strain as he "preached Jesus." To set Him forth, to attract human thought and fix it on Him is their steadfast aim, to which everything is subordinated. Long is the succession of writers, but each rises up to say, "Behold Him," "Hear ye Him." Many are the "voices of the Prophets," but they swell into only one chorus of which He is the song. Many an index rears itself, at varying height and with varying form and communicativeness, along the path of Divine revelations, but "to Jesus" is the one inscription and direction. Many prophets and kings desired to see His day as the only true relief, solace, and satisfaction to human fear and hope. His era is with them the "last days," the "fulness of times," the "dispensation" into which all previous dispensations were to empty themselves, and which was to be eternal and universal in its gifts of grace and light. And so the question of all questions is pressed on everyone, "What think ye of the Christ, what think ye of the Jesus? Do they answer to each other?"

Hardly do I need to insist on the absolute uniqueness of this reference to Jesus. He stands a figure to be confounded with no other. He divides not His honours. He stands in no succession, before or after. He is not a teacher, prophet, saviour by the side or in the rank of others, though the highest. Wondrous teachers, mighty saviours were some of those "ancient men"; but howsoever vast was their trust, howsoever sublime their genius or their inspiration they all "veil their faces" before His glory. They do not predict one another's advent, as Moses that of Samuel or David that of Isaiah, but they do uniformly and exclusively exalt His. The solitary exception of John the Baptist is apparent rather than real. It heightens my contention; for while "the greatest of them that had been born of women," he was announced but as a herald, as a forerunner, as a preparer of the way of the Lord; so his greatness had no independent individuality, and when he reached the height of his functions it was just to testify of his Lord "He must increase, but I must decrease"; it was to "confess, and deny not, but confess I am not the Christ"; it was to intimate that he baptised with water, but Christ would baptise with the Holy Ghost; it was to transfer the foremost disciples he had gathered from himself to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

Seldom do we adequately survey the pressure, the consistency, the accumulation of the witness Scripture bears to Jesus. Here is a literature utterly unlike all other literatures the world has ever seen: the growth of most distant ages, bearing every form of speech, and springing from every diversity of need and occasion, but all tending to one consummation. And to this there is added another literature, most distinct in its origin, widely contrasting in its form, tone and spirit, yet emanating from the same people; and this second literature everywhere insists with jealous energy that the first has been gloriously fulfilled, and that it is the record of that fulfilment. Or, let me put it in another way. Here, through the weary centuries of the past are rising up men, the strongest, the wisest, the best mankind has ever known; men who face the great problems and mysteries of our being and life as none other have ever done; men whose maxims, sighs, and songs have become the great heart-words of every age, the

accepted law and inspiration in life's fiercest conflicts, noblest enterprises, sharpest sufferings, most thrilling crises ; and these men all bid us look to One Who shall certainly come, and come charged and laden with every treasure of wisdom and succour that our exposed and harassed humanity can need. And besides these first men, the men of promise and of hope, there appear in "due time" another set of men, simple, honest, holy, brave, loving, who unite to tell the world that the Coming One has come, has lived, ministered, died, risen again, has taken up the pledges and expectations that went before Him and given them the richest reality : even the Jesus Whom Philip preached. He has proved to be all that was desired, all that was hoped ; yea, a thousand times more. The paths meet, the voices mingle ; the yearning is satisfied. Old Simeon may stand for that as he cries, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." And the salvation that is brought is perfect and efficient, Paul may stand for this ; Paul—with that mighty intellect, with that complex culture that gave him equal facility with Jew and Gentile ; with that extraordinary history that constitutes him an unassailable witness of "the truth as it is in Jesus"—Paul, I say, may stand for this, that the salvation is all-sufficient. Listen to him : "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" ; "Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" ; "in Whom are hid all the treasures of Wisdom and knowledge" ; "for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" ; and He is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Yes, this is the great and blessed end of all Scripture, open it as you please, in the dimness of its shadows or in the light of its realities. Fatally do they "err, not knowing the Scriptures," who fail to trace this as their high function ; and their error, if it be heedless and wilful, is an error of insensibility, ingratitude, and folly with which none other can compare.

It is to the Person Jesus they ever conduct. They would seat us at His feet with Mary ; they would fascinate us with Him with the publicans and sinners who drew near to hear Him ; they would awe us as Peter, James, and John were awed when Elijah and Moses left them alone with Jesus. Opinions, dogmas, and systems are all most secondary ; they may be respected and honoured if they grow out of living converse with Him, but they are not infallible. Much ignorance and great guilt, while there is nevertheless a clinging to His Person, are compatible with life and salvation ; for life here, too, in its beginnings, is small, and light here, too, has its dawn. But the broadest, the keenest theology, the compactest system of divinity is of no service save as it roots itself in reverential and obedient acceptance of His Person.

III. In the intensity of the converse of Philip and the eunuch we see the interest of Scripture commended. No fact grows more patent than the world's need of all that the Scriptures assure us of Jesus. There is no light from Heaven if it does not shine in Him. There is no bread from Heaven if He does not supply it. It is an old world we inhabit. Centuries of generations have preceded us. The cries of the human heart have pierced the air, night and day, in city and solitude all the world over ; sin, sorrow, and death have held their way till some have doubted whether such a world could ever have emanated from a righteous and beneficent Being. Philosophies have tried to solve the doubt, and priest-hoods to quiet the conscience. The resources of power and wealth and art and learning have been expended without avail. All history through they only have

been able to bear the strain and struggle who have possessed more or less of the light of this blessed storehouse of Divine compassion and grace. How true this is in our twentieth century of Christianity is impressed by the fact, already noted, that these Scriptures in even many of their earlier records and songs are still the vehicles of men's loftiest aspirations and most passionate yearnings. Instinct and argument alike turn to this book as unto "a light that shineth in a dark place." And in Jesus we discover strength, life, and peace. He brings no superfluous good. He has made no mistake in the world to which He has come. When He loaded Himself with gifts from the treasury of Heaven He took never a bounty for which the sons of men could furnish no meet recipient. They who were the victims of every physical ill, privation, and disease wanted not His healing mercies more than our consciences, hearts, and wills require His spiritual aid. He writes out all His fulness by the side of our necessities; breathes all His compassions in response to our woes; speaks to us in every tone suited to our conditions; meets us in every path we tread; arms and sustains us in every conflict we wage. He condones the past, sanctifies the present, lights up the future for everyone trusting in Him. The Scriptures which hold Him forth do us the double service of conviction of our need and then of infallible direction to Him.

IV. In the issue of this converse of Philip and the eunuch we see the power of Scripture manifested. "He went on his way rejoicing." It is not difficult to imagine the great elements of that joy. The fulness, variety, and harmony of Scripture; the compassion, wisdom, steadfastness of God through all the preparatory measures which led up to the advent of Jesus; the power, grace, and life brought by Him; rest of mind in this truth, and of heart in this mercy; the new creation into which the receiver of Jesus passes and rises. These were some of its glorious elements, and meditation, prayer, experience would but deepen that joy, as he passed further and further away from "the old things," and further and further into the "new things" prepared and ensured for ever to them that love Him.

Believing in Christ

BY REV. A. H. WASHBURN, D.D.

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."—Acts viii. 37.

The Church prescribes that when a person comes to Holy Baptism, the minister shall ask whether he believes "all the articles of the Christian faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed." St. Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." I wish to show that these questions are identical, and that we are thus following the instruction of Holy Scripture. The article, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son," is almost the same in terms as the answer of the Eunuch of Ethiopia, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." It is the very centre of the Creed, the heart of the body of the Creed, the Sun, and Life, and Light of it all. It thus embraces all the articles of our belief; and to believe in Christ is to believe the Creed; to confess the Creed is to confess Christ; to say Dost thou believe the Creed, is to say Dost thou believe in Christ?

We often hear the expression that the condition of salvation is belief in Christ. If understood aright this is true. It is Scriptural; for the Apostles Paul and Silas said to the keeper of their prison, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." It is evident, however, that this phrase

is commonly used by many persons who have little conception of its true meaning, and in whose mouths therefore it takes the character of cant. For it is made the description and apology for every variety of opinion and every false doctrine, heresy, and schism which prevails around us. Surely to believe that Christ once lived is not enough, for that would be consistent with the denial of all His Divine character. And so the acknowledgment of any one fact, or any part of that which belongs to Him, being attended by a denial of all else, is quite as much disbelief as belief in Him. Can anything be plainer, then, than that a true faith—belief—is that which accepts every attribute of His character, every event of His life, every fact of His mission, and every office He bears? The true believer must confess that He is the Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, that He came by a mysterious and miraculous birth to be the Son of Man, and so He is God-Man, that He proved His mission by many superhuman signs, that He taught and spake as never man spake, that He bore our infirmities in His temptations and sorrows, that He suffered our punishment in a fearfully painful mocking, and scourging, and death, that He rose the first fruits of the coming up of the dead, that He ascended to the Father, that He will come again to judge the world, that He sends the Holy Ghost, that He has planted a Church to be His visible body, that He is ever working in that body and will preserve it to the end. If Christ is the Son of God, how can any man believe in Him and not in God the Father? If He sends the Comforter, how can the denier of God the Holy Ghost accept the Son? If He saves us from our sins, how deny the pains by which He expiated them? If the Church is His body, how does he who denies the Church or adheres to man-made churches believe in Him? If salvation is in His body, how deny the baptism for the remission of sins by which we enter into that body? These are all parts, but parts of a whole, and that is Christ. Every virtue of our lives is drawn from His life and His teaching: every strength in temptation and every consolation in trouble comes from His promise and presence: all dogmas of Christianity are parts of Him: sacraments flow from His wounds: the Church is Christ—Christ's Body. Take away anything that we are taught to hold, and you will take away a part from Him: and so if you deny any one thing you deny a part of Him. If you snap one link of a chain, how much will the chain then hold? If you remove one stone from an arch, how long will the arch stand? So the faith all centres in Christ, and its parts are links of a chain and well fitted stones of a glorious arch.

History illustrates the truth of this important fact. For if you believe only that Jesus was a great, and good, and wonder-working Man, you believe with the Mahometan, and may reverence a false prophet more than Him. If you acknowledge Him as the Son of God but not God, you then believe with Arius. If you pretend to believe, but hold not the Communion of Saints, you are but a Sadducee. If you omit from your faith the Holy Catholic Church, you join hands with the numberless sects of modern days, and are ready to partake of their schism, and with them tear asunder the Lord's body. I might go on at great length in these illustrations; but I trust enough has been said to show that all the faith is one and bound together, and all centres in "One Lord Jesus Christ," and when we bow at His name we bow assent to all and every the articles of our belief.

Do you not see, then, beloved, that we must be careful how we receive and assent to this common remark, that it is enough for a man if he only believe on Christ? It is a weapon used against the Church. It is a favourite argument of sectism. It means, if all that is unsaid were supplied: A man may not acknow-

ledge the Incarnation, if he only believe on Christ; he need not accept the Church; he need not even be baptised; he is safe in embracing any heresy, in any schism he is still a part of the body, only if he believe on Christ. What monstrous inconsistency! Say that a man may well have no heart if he only live; that he may safely be deprived of life-blood, or of his brain, and all is well if he only be alive! But if you attempt to trifle with the living body by depriving it of heart, or blood, or head, its life will expire also. Brethren, believe no such false arguments—assent not to them when you hear them.

I have gone on at such length in the hope to make clear this: that the whole Creed is the confession of Christ. To return: St. Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," and he of Ethiopia answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This was the preface of his baptism into the Church. We say, "Dost thou believe all the articles of the Christian Faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed?" And he who is to be baptised answers, "I do." The two are identical—the two questions and the two answers—because the Apostles' Creed is the confession of Christ, its parts are all necessary to a full confession of Him; and therefore to believe the articles of the Creed is to believe on Him, and nothing which curtails them can be a perfect faith.

In this I must not be understood as saying that the abridgment of the faith in some article will necessarily deprive a man of his part in the Salvation of Christ. Our dear Lord is very merciful. How far His mercy may reach none of us can tell. Though a body in schism cannot claim to be longer Christ's body, the Church, yet many individual members of that body undoubtedly enjoy His love and His Spirit. And so it may be of one who fails to confess the whole Creed. He abridges the faith, he wounds his Lord, he incurs great peril, he fails of the perfect stature of the Christian believer, and yet the arms of a grace stretching as wide as the universe may still embrace, and he may be saved "so as by fire." All that I can say is, that it is only he who believes on the Lord by an intelligent acceptance of all the parts of the Christian faith who rightly and duly confesses Him.

A very important conclusion from the whole matter, and one that we will do well to ponder, is that we repeat the vows of our baptism whenever we say the Creed. It was a solemn moment when we were at the portals of the Church asking to be received within. Hitherto without the pale of the Gospel, we were then to be made members of Christ. And then we answered, or our sponsors for us, that we believed, just as the Ethiopian said, "I believe." The ages of ages will only show us more and more how signal was the day in our whole existence. But the momentous vow we are ever rehearsing, and the rehearsal should be ever setting before us the solemnity and the joy of our spiritual birth-day. When we begin with "I believe," remembering that now we are about to speak, not to man, but to God; when we rehearse, one by one, the glorious sentences that have been syllabled by the ages all along; when we bow our heads at the most blessed of all names, and gather up and compress in that one gesture the whole Creed—the whole faith; let us ever think that then we are bowing to God over and over again, a new taking upon ourselves our part of the everlasting covenant, almost baptised anew.

And the same considerations teach us to look upon this as not only a solemnity, but a most glorious privilege. Beloved, the covenant is the contract of our salvation, and how are they connected, the faith, the baptism, the covenant! In professing the faith we are laying hold anew upon the covenant, and so in it we are having repeated to us God's abiding promise. Is not this a precious

blessing? Other men profess and accept the same Creed, but they never learn it, never teach it, never think of it. Oh! thank God that, in His great goodness to us, He has brought us into the Church where we can, in the solemnity of His worship, over and over again lay hold upon the seal of His hand-writing, the everlasting covenant. What meaning is there in the Creed when we thus think of it, the centre of the rites of the Church, gathering up into itself our whole worship, as its second article "Jesus Christ" gathers to itself the whole Creed! How great is the happiness to rehearse it to our covenant-keeping God! and how can we help bowing at the Glorious Name which is thus the bright star in the centre of all that we here do!

The Rapture of St. Philip and of the Eunuch

BY VERY REV. E. M. GOULBURN, D.D.

"When they were come up out of the water," &c.—Acts viii. 39, 40.

The eunuch, converted as he was before Cornelius, was the earliest first-fruits of the Gentile Church. His baptism, therefore, was a remarkable epoch in the Church's history, and, as such, was to be authenticated by a remarkable operation of the Spirit of God, both upon the subject and upon the administrator of it.

The subject of it went on his way rejoicing, apparently so transported with holy and spiritual joy, that he noticed not the removal of the missionary. In order to connect this joy with the operation of the Holy Ghost, we have only to remember that joy is named by St. Paul as one of the first-fruits of the Spirit; "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."

The missionary himself was transported in the body to another region, where work of another character awaited him; and this transportation is expressly ascribed to the Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." The word is the same as that which St. Paul employs to speak of his own rapture into the third Heaven, and into Paradise ("caught up to the third Heaven," "caught up into Paradise"); only there the region into which he was caught away was invisible and heavenly, and the Apostle himself did not know whether at the time he was "in the body or out of the body." Here the transportation was merely to another spot of earth; and it was clearly "in the body." Again the same word is used, where it is said that at the Lord's Second Advent, immediately after the resurrection of the dead in Christ, "we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." Here the transport spoken of will be a transport of the risen and glorified body, not to another spot of earth, but into the air. The more complete parallel to St. Philip's case is to be found in the writings of Ezekiel, where we read on several occasions that "the Spirit took him up," "lifted him up, and took him away"; "put forth the form of an hand and took him by a lock of his head; and lifted him up between the earth and the heaven, and brought him in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate." And that the prophets underwent a transport of this kind frequently, so much so that persons conversant with them could not always feel certain of their whereabouts, may be gathered from the apprehensive words which Obadiah addressed to Elijah: "It shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me"; and again, from the petition respecting Elijah, which was addressed to Elisha:

"Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master; lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley."

Thus, then, the reception of this child of Ham into the Church of Jesus Christ was authenticated by a twofold operation of the Spirit, ordinary and extraordinary—a rapture of the eunuch's mind—a rapture of St. Philip's body.

I. The event which occurred to St. Philip was miraculous, and such as does not occur now-a-days. But we may learn important lessons from it, doctrinal and practical.

1. It teaches, in consonance with other parts of God's Word, that there may be an operation of the Spirit upon the body of man. Perhaps this is a truth which hardly enters into the circle of our religious ideas. The Apostle indeed writes: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; evidently recognising the body, no less than the spirit and soul, as capable of sanctification. And again, he represents the change which is to be wrought upon the Christian's body at the Resurrection as due to the operation of the same Spirit, which already dwells in his soul. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also *quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you*." But these expressions are not easily adjusted with the popular theology. We commonly regard the body as the great encumbrance and clog upon the spirit, and as the great hindrance to the aspirations of piety. We confound it in thought with the flesh, and most unscripturally look to our disenthralment from it by death, instead of our resumption of it at the Resurrection, as the great consummation of our nature. St. Paul felt painfully the infirmities of the body, and the depressing influence exerted by those infirmities on the mind, "We that are in this tabernacle," he writes, "do groan, being burdened"; but he immediately cautions us against supposing that the laying down of the body at death was the object of his desire: "Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

The Apostle shuddered at the thought of dissolution, as we all must do; what he longed for was to be clothed upon with the Resurrection Body, "that house from Heaven," which shall be a meet and suitable tenement for the glorified soul. Nor, while he felt acutely the burden of the flesh, did he ignore the possibility even at present of consecrating the body to God, or the noble uses which, so consecrated, it may serve. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present *your bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Let us frame our view of the body, then, upon St. Paul's. Let us give to it its due place in the circle of our responsibilities, our hopes, our prospects. Let us regard it as having been solemnly dedicated to God in Baptism, as a temple for His indwelling, and an instrumentality for His service. Let us consecrate our eyes to Him by mortifying the lust of the eyes, and by the devout study of His oracles and His works of nature; our ears, by turning them from flatteries and sinful enticements, and by opening them to His Word; our hands, by labouring in our vocation, and by giving alms; our feet, by making them carry us on errands of mercy; our mouths, by setting a watch over them, and employing them to tell forth His praise. And when, beset by weariness or pain, the laggard body refuses to obey the motions of the willing spirit, let us turn this also to account by sighing and longing, and praying for that blessed time when "the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall change our vile body," &c.

2. There is something very instructive in the circumstance of St. Philip's vanishing as soon as his mission was accomplished, and leaving the Ethiopian in enjoyment of his newly-found treasure. The human minister, having put him into possession of Christ, leaves him alone with Christ. It should be the ambition of every minister to do the same. The more his Master is esteemed by the hearers, and the less he himself is seen or thought of, the more faithfully and commendably his ministry is fulfilled. John the Baptist (though he lived only in the twilight dawn of our dispensation) is in this, as in other points, a great model for the Christian Minister. He pointed his disciples away from himself to "the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world," and without a single pang of envy saw them following the Lamb, and seeking to acquaint themselves with Him. And when informed that the tide of popular favour was drawing off from his ministry, and that Christ was superseding him in men's minds and hearts, the high-souled prophet accepted the announcement with joy, most willing to be nothing, so as only Christ was all; "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." And the Apostle Paul, who, if any minister was entitled to do so, might have obtruded his own pretensions upon his converts, distinctly disavows doing so. "We preach not ourselves," says he, "but Jesus Christ, the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

And may we not venture a step further, and say that one reason why our Lord Himself, while on earth, was so reticent on the subject of His Atoning work, may have been that even He would not preach Himself? He testified abundantly of the Father, and most explicitly also of the Comforter; but as for Himself, He was to be exhibited, not by Himself, but by His inspired Apostles. Can any circumstance more clearly prove that the human minister ought himself to vanish as much as possible from the minds of men, that Christ may fill the whole field of view?

And let me add that, while the minister may not *personally* obtrude himself, it is quite possible that he may thrust *his office* into a prominence which does not belong to it. Taking the highest estimate of it (and no one who frames his views on Holy Scripture will take a low one), the ministerial office is only instrumental. It is the ordained channel for conducting souls to Christ, and putting them into communion with Him. But nothing is easier, and nothing more disturbs the whole doctrinal system of religion, than the erection of means into ends. Let us be on our guard against such misrepresentations of truth. I am not denying for a moment that in any regular course of religious instruction the commission of the Christian Minister, with his duties, responsibilities, prerogatives, authority, should be fully considered in its turn. I only say that Christ did not send us to preach His *Ministry* as the great central Truth, but to preach *Himself*, and His ministry as leading up to Him by an ordained and consecrated instrumentality. All tendency to undue exaltation of the Christian Priesthood will be effectually checked, if the point of view be right. Ministers exist for the sake of the Church, not the Church for the sake of Ministers. "Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas are yours." "He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the *perfecting of the saints*, for the *work of the ministry*, for the *edifying of the body of Christ*."

II. We now come to the mental transport of the convert of St. Philip. We are told that "the eunuch saw him no more; for" (so it is in the original) "he went on his way rejoicing; but Philip was found at Azotus." The Evan-

gelist was carried away in one direction ; his convert proceeded on his journey home in another ; for which reason they never met again — this may be the force of the “ for.” Or, as others interpret it, we may understand some words after “ saw him no more,” which will explain the particle : “ the eunuch saw him no more — indeed he did not care to see him, *for* he went on his way rejoicing ” ; his own ecstasy was so great as to prevent his noticing Philip’s departure. Anyhow, the passage implies that the joy of the new convert entirely occupied him, so that St. Philip was not missed.

And this is a very observable fact, and one which claims a remark or two. We do not usually think well of those who are unmindful of their benefactors in things temporal. But he who, like St. Philip, confers a spiritual benefit upon others — he who points us to, and puts us in possession of, the hidden treasure of the Gospel, does he not, more than any temporal benefactor, deserve to be held by us in everlasting remembrance ? Assuredly. There is no earthly tie more pure, none more enduring, than that which binds the disciple of Christ to one who has begotten him through the Gospel, who has been to him his father in Christ Jesus. But in judging of the eunuch’s state of mind, we are to remember that St. Philip was a perfect stranger to him, and that the interview between them had perhaps scarcely lasted a single hour. There had been no time for any feeling of attachment to grow up between them ; this sudden coming and going of the Gospel messenger invested him with the appearance of an Angel from Heaven. Bear in mind also that a new and glorious field had been opened to the eunuch, in which his thoughts might delightfully expatiate. He had the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah with him in his chariot ; and Philip having given him the key to the prophecy, every perplexed passage seems to open as he applies the key for himself ; Christ, the new-found treasure of his soul, is seen in every verse and line. It seems to me as if God would give us in the eunuch a specimen of joy purely and perfectly spiritual in its character. If affectionate regard to the human minister had entered into it, as it must have done, had that minister been for a longer time associated with him, the sentiment would not have been as pure. As it is, the joy of Christ’s salvation, the deep absorbing interest of exploring this new-found treasure in the Word of God, this was all in all with him ; there was just at present no room for other thoughts in his mind. I suppose that, like all strong emotions, this early tumult of joy settled down sooner or later into a more tranquil frame. And then the eunuch, on his return to entire self-possession, would notice, as he had hardly done before, the removal of St. Philip. The observation would, no doubt, confirm his faith. This man, he would naturally think, so miraculously taken from me, must have been miraculously sent to me in the Providence of God. His extraordinary disappearance as soon as his work was done authenticates his Divine mission. It was no chance traveller whom I picked up in my route. It was God Who threw that good man in my way. Then would come speculations as to who he was, whether really a man, as he seemed, or only an Angel in the guise of man, of which, as the good Ethiopian must have known, there had been many instances in old Testament story. And then, perhaps, the feeling that, if he were indeed a man, the pleasant communion and intercourse between them had only been broken off for a season, and not even that spiritually. He was now a member of one Body with this Christian missionary, and partaker of one Spirit with him ; he was animated by a common hope of glory, owned a common Lord, confessed one Faith, shared in one Baptism, called one God Father, and looked up to that God with the same filial confidence and affection. And this spiritual union, he might think, was the pledge of a mutual recognition hereafter in the Kingdom of Glory, when

he should have the opportunity of acknowledging his debt to Philip, and when both should look back upon that Baptism in the wilderness as the most deeply interesting and critical passage of their lives.

"But Philip was found at Azotus" or Ashdod. This had been formerly one of the chief cities of the Philistines, nominally within the territory of the tribe of Judah, but never really subjugated by the Israelites, and even down to the time of Nehemiah containing a race of aliens. Its importance was derived from its lying on the high road from Palestine to Egypt. "And passing through" (northward) "he preached in all the cities till he came to Casarea." Two cities lying on or near his route were Lydda and Joppa. These we find St. Peter visiting in the course of the next chapter; in the former he healed the paralytic Aeneas, in the latter he raised Dorcas or Tabitha from the dead. It appears, therefore, that St. Philip prepared the way for the Apostles in the cities which lay along the coast-line of Palestine, as he had formerly done in Samaria. He it was who first preached Christ in those cities, and admitted to the Church by Baptism such of the inhabitants as joyfully received the glad tidings. St. Peter subsequently visited the Churches thus planted, confirmed them in the Faith, and probably (though this is not stated) laid his hands upon the new converts, as he had done at Samaria, and invoked on them the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Most instructive it is to notice the change in the character of St. Philip's labours. He has had an hour's most interesting and heart-refreshing conversation with the eunuch. It was a bright gleam of spiritual sunshine for him; for he could not question the sincerity of that simple soul's conversion; and it must have occurred to the Evangelist, that through the eunuch, as a man of wealth and rank, it might please God to open a door for the evangelization of Ethiopia. And having been the instrument of this conversion, Philip in prophetic rapture was snatched away, and planted down in an outlying and foreign town, full of heathen associations. From this circumstance he gathers that he is designed to preach there; and accordingly he opens his mouth once again to give the glad tidings of the Saviour now no longer to a single soul, but among the townspeople. And this was but the beginning of a series of labours whereby the whole sea-coast of Palestine was evangelized. No doubt the seed of God's Word fell on much good ground in the course of the missionary tour, but no very signal success is recorded.

The lesson is, that in this life periods of spiritual refreshment must ever be succeeded by hard and toilsome work. Pleasant communion with the Ethiopian, whose heart burns within him as we talk with him of Jesus, must be followed by public ministrations among a multitude where, while some receive the Word with joy, some doubt, and others, perchance, sneer. The sweet and ecstatic converse on the Mount of Transfiguration, which made us feel it good for us to be there, must give place to questionings with the scribes in the valley, to spectacles of suffering and cries for relief. The Christian—much more the Christian minister—must not expect to spend his life in a trance of delicious feeling. Deep interests, warm sympathies, holy and elevating thoughts will spring up in his mind like flowers beneath his feet as he walks in the way of duty; but the next moment they seem brushed away by the breaking in of toils and cares, which seem to say: "Ye are not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you." Not yet! but that "not yet" leads our thoughts to a happier condition of existence, where rest in the Lord and joy in the Lord shall be unintermittent—flowing from the light of His countenance and smile, Whom "now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face."

The Mysteries of the Gospel

BY REV. FREDERICK FIELD, LL.D.

'When they were come up out of the water,' &c.—Acts viii. 39.

The Athenians are noted by St. Paul, in the 17th chapter of this Book, as being of a very superstitious, or over-religious, character. He made this remark from having merely passed through the streets, and beheld (what he calls) their "devotions": that is, the immense number of temples, altars, and other idolatrous objects with which that famous city was adorned. But besides this, which we may call their public religion, they had certain secret ceremonies, called *mysteries*, at which none were allowed to be present who had not been previously *initiated*, or duly admitted, after a preparatory course of instruction into the full privileges of membership. At these mysteries certain doctrines were taught, which being carefully kept secret, like those of our Freemasons, can never be certainly known: but they are supposed to have related to the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. If so, we see the necessity for all this secrecy and mystery; because these sublime truths, however acceptable to those who are prepared to receive them, would only have shocked the minds of those who had been brought up in the superstitions of the Gentile world. But however that may be, the initiated themselves, the members of those societies always spoke in the most glowing terms of the great privilege of belonging to them, and of the effects of the things which they heard and saw at those secret meetings upon their general comfort and happiness, especially in the contemplation of another state of being. We find sentiments of this kind in books still extant, written by persons who possessed this privilege. "Most fortunate of mortal," says one of these, "are they who having witnessed these ceremonies go down to the tomb." "Here," says another, "I learnt the true method, not only of enjoying life, but of dying with a better hope." In the present discourse we intend to draw a parallel between the members of these secret societies and those who have been initiated in the mysteries of the Gospel. The text affords us a convenient occasion for such a comparison. This Ethiopian nobleman had just been made a member of the mystical body of Christ, having been first informed of all that was necessary for him to know, previous to his admission, and now he pursues his journey, in the words of the heathen writer just quoted, having learnt both how to enjoy life and to die with a better hope.

We say, first, that the way of salvation by Jesus Christ is a *mystery*. "Without controversy," says the Apostle, "great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh." Before the coming of Christ it was, in the strictest sense of the word, a *mystery*, or hidden doctrine, the knowledge of which was entirely unattainable to the world in general. The "eternal power and Godhead" of the Almighty might be understood from the works of creation; not so His eternal purpose for the salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ. Natural Religion knows nothing of a Redeemer. To what extent the patriarchs, prophets, and other pious men under the Old Testament were initiated in this mystery, or how far they would have been able to give a clear and satisfactory answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" we know not. But we are sure that all besides them were completely in the dark, and did not even know of the existence of such a secret doctrine in the world, until the moment that it was "made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the Prophets made known to all nations

for the obedience of faith." But now when that happened, you will say, the mystery was cleared up. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it." Here, it might be supposed, all comparison ceases between this and the heathen mysteries. Christians, as well in their doctrines as in their worship court publicity. As to the one, the records of the Christian Faith are placed in the hands of all classes, and we make it a boast that we have no private, traditional or unwritten doctrines, none besides what are contained in or may be fairly collected from that book. And as to the other, we hold our religious assemblies in broad daylight, with open doors, so that the merest stranger passing by may come in and make one of us. And even in those "holy mysteries," as they are called, in which we would not be so intruded upon, and which, being confined to a few of the more enlightened members of the congregation, might be thought to approach more nearly to the nature of the heathen mysteries; yet even in these there is no affectation of secrecy or mysteriousness. Public notice is given; the invitation extends to all that are in the Church; and anyone who is curious to know what passes at those private meetings may read the whole order and proceedings of them in his Prayer Book. So far there is no analogy between the Christian religion and the mysteries of the Gentile superstition.

But in another sense there is. Notwithstanding all the publicity which has been given to it, the Gospel is still "the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery." Be not deceived by the imposing sound of a Christian country, or even of the Christian world; but just look around you, and observe what is the real state of the case.

How many do we see who never trouble themselves about any religion; brutish persons, "having no hope, and without God in the world." To such persons all things connected with the soul or the invisible world; all things which do not act upon the bodily senses; all things, in short, which are not to "perish in the using," are *mysteries*. They do not care to hear or to know anything about such matters. They say in their hearts, There is no God. There is no future state of existence. There is no such things as human accountability. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and there is nothing after death. What say you to men of this character? Do they belong to the mystical body of Christ? Have they any part or lot in this matter? Is it not just the same to them, as if Christians had no published doctrines, no open assemblies, but were accustomed, like the heathen mystics, to meet with closed doors, in the dead of night, to perform certain secret ceremonies and to hear words which it should not be lawful to repeat beyond these walls?

But again; to these must be added a great number, who profess and call themselves Christians, but through the deplorable ignorance which is in them have not, in fact, advanced beyond the first principles of natural religion. That God is, that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; that "the wicked will be turned into hell, with all the people that forget God"; these doctrines lie at the foundation of all religion; the Gospel could not stand without them; but they are not the Gospel. It is probable that the more enlightened of the heathens had attained to so much religious instruction as this; if, indeed, these were not the very truths which were taught in their mysteries. It is certain that the Ethiopian Eunuch had advanced further than this; since he had been up to Jerusalem to worship the God of the Bible, and now returning he was reading a portion of that Bible; "sitting in his chariot he read Esaias the prophet." Yet he was one of the *uninitiated*; he knew nothing, understood nothing, of the Christian mysteries, until Philip began at that place of Scripture,

which he had open, and preached unto him Jesus. His ignorance was excusable : how could he hear without a preacher ? how could he even understand what he was reading, unless some man should guide him ? But that, in a Christian country, where there is no lack of instructors, any persons should be content with knowing and serving God after the light of nature, is unpardonable. If we have anything to ask of God, as we cannot pass a day without finding that we want something : is it nothing to know that there is a Mediator between God and man, in Whose name we may go "boldly to the Throne of Grace," and "make our requests known unto God" ? If any man sin, as there is no man that sinneth not, is it a small advantage to be assured that "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" ; and that the same is also "the propitiation for our sins" ? If we would do good, as most of us are sometimes disposed to do good, but find, wretched men that we are, that "there is a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin that is in our members," is it a truth worth knowing, that there is an appointed method, and of easy attainment, by which we may be "renewed in the spirit of our minds," and enabled to do the good that we would, and to abstain from doing the evil that we would not ? Such are the mysteries which are contained in our sacred books ; recognised in our public services ; explained and enforced with every variety of argument and illustration by those who are properly called the ministers and stewards of these mysteries. But however "the lips of the priest may *keep* the knowledge" which is committed to him, he cannot minister it to those who will not "seek the law at his mouth." It is of this wilful and inexcusable ignorance that the Apostle speaks, when he says, "If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

But there is a *third* class of persons, who by availing themselves of the common means of instruction (such as reading or hearing the Word of God, earnest attendance on the preaching of the same, converse or meditation upon divine things) have attained to a competent understanding of those truths, which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health. Well, you will say, these then are the *initiated*. Happy men ! "to you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." You may "go on your way rejoicing." You have nothing to do but to reap the fruits of your knowledge ; and to convince them that are without, that Christians are in possession of the only true method, both of enjoying life and of dying with a good hope. But let us not be too hasty. Our Lord tells us of those who "seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand." And the reason is this, because "their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and healed." Is this the description of a few of the more stupid and sensual part of mankind ? or is it not rather the condition of every man's mind by nature with respect to the reception of divine truth ? We are born, we come into the world, with a certain incapacity of heartily apprehending these mysteries, be they ever so clearly exhibited to the understanding. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." He understands them well enough ; they are the plainest truths in the world ; but he does not receive them ; he does not see the necessity, or appreciate the value of them ; in the words of the Apostle, "They are *foolishness* to him." This is the worst symptom of our disorder ; that we cannot bear the remedies which would do us good. Nothing can overcome this but a Divine influence. No instruction can convert the soul but the teaching of the Spirit. "No man

can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." He is the only Priest (Hierophant) and Interpreter of His own mysteries. The very best human guidance can lead us no further than the threshold. There stands One Who "shutteth and no man openeth, and openeth and no man shutteth." And this power He exercises in a manner which sets at nought all the conclusions of man's judgment. As a general rule, "He hideth these things from the wise and prudent, and revealeth them unto babes." Carnal wisdom, which boasts that it understands all mysteries and all knowledge, is turned from the door; while an abundant entrance is ministered unto those who, having no conceit of their own knowledge, desire nothing better than to be "taught of God." Under such instruction it is not surprising that they should make rapid progress in "the wisdom which is from above." Their spiritual discernment, like every other faculty, is sharpened by exercise, until it is able to cope with the most sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Still they find, as they proceed, regions yet unexplored, and fresh discoveries of the "kindness and love of God their Saviour," of which they had no conception before. This furnishes them with a continual spur to exertion; and they determine with themselves never to be satisfied until they shall "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of God, which passeth knowledge." But *that* they find after all is the true description of it: *it passeth knowledge*; it never can be fully comprehended, or perfectly known. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

It might, indeed, be thought that truths, like those of the Gospel, however spiritual and sublime, are mere speculations, and have no connection with the comfortable enjoyment of life. But nothing can be more erroneous than such an idea. The very names of these mysteries ought to convince us to the contrary. Does it not nearly concern our comfort and happiness to know that there is no condemnation, or remembrance of past sins, to them that are in Christ Jesus? Yet *that* is the mystery of man's *justification*. Or that there is a Divine influence pledged to us, to enable us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world"? Yet *that* is the mystery of man's *sanctification*. Or that there is a free access opened to us to the Throne of Grace, so that now we may at all times draw near in full assurance of faith, and make our requests, our wants and weaknesses, our joys and sorrows, known unto God? Yet *that* is the mystery of Christ's mediatorial and intercessory office. But behold, I show you another mystery: and will you tell me *that* the resurrection of the body, the most sublime and inscrutable of all the mysteries of redemption, has nothing to do with your enjoyment of life, or consolation in death? You dare not say so. You know it to be otherwise. You cannot but feel that it is the only reflection which enables you to lay your loved ones in the grave with Christian resignation, or to look forward to the event of your own dissolution with Christian hope.

Thus, then, we are brought back to the example of the text. Those who have been truly initiated into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are enabled, through the knowledge thus imparted to them, to "go on their way rejoicing." It was mentioned before, that a like advantage was *said* to belong to those who had been admitted into the Grecian mysteries. They looked down with pity upon the uninitiated common people, and boasted that they alone possessed the secret of happiness, which they were able to carry with them to the tomb.

With how much greater propriety may a Christian adopt this boast, and laying his hand on the Scriptures of truth say, "Here I learnt the true method, not only of enjoying life, but of dying with a better hope. All my life long I have been seeking this divine art, and going about from one professor of it to another, saying, 'Who will show me any good?' In this pursuit there is no trouble or sacrifice which I have not cheerfully submitted to; 'whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy.' But 'what fruit had I then in those things, whereof I am now ashamed? *for the end of those things is death.*' My own heart told me so at the time; and here, in this book, I find my worst anticipations confirmed. But the very same text, which informed me that 'the wages of sin is death,' assured me also that 'the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ His Son.' These words opened a new and boundless prospect to my ravished soul. I had penetrated the *grand arcana* (great mystery). Eternal life! inexhaustible happiness! pleasures undecaying and for evermore freely bestowed on all who faithfully seek through Jesus Christ. Truly, I said, this is a secret worth knowing. The very pursuit of this prize will yield me greater satisfaction than the attainment of any inferior one. And so it proved. The revelation of this mystery elevated my views, and purified my affections. A 'hope full of immortality' took possession of my soul. From that time 'all carnal affections' began to decay 'and die in me, and all things belonging to the spirit to live and grow in me.' Possessing an inward peace, which no man take can from me, 'I have learnt, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' Prosperity elates me not, nor adversity depresses, so long as I can 'rejoice in the Lord always,' and 'hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, steadfast unto the end.' Even the near approach of death, that which makes fools of wise men, and cowards of the brave, shakes me not. My comfort is this, 'the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God I have had my conversation in the world.' 'I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.'"

May we all, my brethren, strive to become so perfectly initiated in the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, as to be able to express ourselves in this exalted strain. May we always return home from our assemblies in this place praising God for all that we have seen and heard, and saying one to another, "It is good for us to have been there." May we enjoy this feeling in its highest degree, whenever we attend at the celebration of those holy mysteries, to which we have been this day invited. Returning from this Sacrament, as the Eunuch did from the other, may we, like him, be enabled to "go on our way rejoicing," lightened of every weight and incumbrance, whether of sin or sorrow, and filled with all "joy and peace in believing."

Rejoicing in Penitence

BY REV. JOHN KEBLE, M.A.

"He went on his way rejoicing."—Acts viii. 39.

Upon these words it seems natural to remark what is the temper and disposition of mind in which people may be expected to go on their way when they have sincerely received Christ's Gospel: received it into an *obedient* heart. The

natural fruit of such good resolutions, the consequence of endeavouring to live by faith in Christ crucified, is joy, satisfaction, cheerfulness of mind. Such persons go on their way through life, rejoicing that they have such a good and merciful God, a Father, a Saviour, and a Comforter at every moment watching over them. They try in earnest to love and serve Him Who has done so much for them, and therefore, happen what may, it cheers them to remember and know "that all things work together for good to such as love God."

This feeling, you will observe, did not make the eunuch turn out of his way. "He *went on* his way rejoicing." He still pursued his worldly calling, as it was his duty to do; but with more life and spirit, more cheerfulness and energy than before. For now he had clearly set before him the blessed hope of everlasting life, with which God, for Christ's sake, had promised to crown his sincere endeavours. The prize of his high calling, constantly in view, would naturally make him not less but more industrious, not more indifferent to other men, but more anxious to do them good—more careful of his time, more fervent in spirit, more open and awake to all the reasons for thankfulness with which God's bounty has filled the world.

Now this Christian cheerfulness may be considered in two ways: both as a privilege, and as a duty. As a privilege, it is surely the greatest of earthly comforts to have what are called "good spirits," and to be enabled to serve God in our calling *heartily*. But here people must be on their guard: for a mistake about the privilege of Christian cheerfulness may be very painful and very hurtful too. Devout and sincere men are not to depend upon having "better spirits" always in every sense of that expression.

Yet still it will hold true, that the more thoroughly devout and resigned you are, the better chance you have of this great blessing, a cheerful heart. Sickness or sorrow may cast you down: but having a sure arm to lean on you will not sink so low as you would otherwise, nor find so much difficulty in reviving. In short, true devotion, patiently and calmly practised, has power, by God's blessing sooner or later, to take out the sting of melancholy itself; except where God, in His secret and sovereign goodness, permits the very mind to be diseased. In all other cases of dejection whatsoever, true repentance and resignation of yourself to God in Christ Jesus is the true secret of a cheerful spirit.

For instance, could ever anything be imagined, more likely to make a sick man cheerful, than the sure and comfortable hope of being restored to perfect health, before many years are past? It may not always overcome, or even seem to assuage, the feeling of bodily pain and languor: but surely such a hope as this must do a great deal towards keeping up their spirits—must come over them, like a refreshing gale, at times when they most want it; and must render their intervals of ease and quiet infinitely more delightful and consoling. The reasonable hope of everlasting life and health will turn every half hour of abated pain into a great blessing indeed, a spiritual as well as earthly blessing. It makes it a sort of token or pledge of the rest prepared for the faithful in Heaven.

Again, what should make a labouring man cheerful, if not the knowledge of having a friend near him, strong and able, and ready and willing to bear all his burthen for him? Now, this is just their feeling, who consider as they ought the presence of the Holy Spirit—the power of God promised, in answer to hearty prayer, to purify our corrupt nature, and help us to do works pleasing to God. If they were left to themselves they might fear that it was too hard a task for them to keep the commandments—that their being holy (and of course their being happy) was out of the question. As it is, they have every encouragement to work out their own salvation with peace and joy, as well as with fear and

trembling : knowing that it is God Who worketh in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

But what is still more to the purpose, he who seriously considers *and practises* the faith which Jesus Christ has taught us ; he, and he only, may reasonably hope to have his sins forgiven. And surely, next to the sense of being *innocent* (which no child of Adam can have), the sense of being *pardoned* is the most cheering of all things. Now, this is what no one need doubt, who will look steadily to the Cross of Christ, and own Him for his Saviour, not only by his lips, but in his life.

And let us not mistake this matter. Very many, too many, seem easy and quiet in their minds, have no misgivings about being pardoned, because, in good truth, they have not considered the thing seriously : they have gone on taking for granted that all is right, and they are as good as their neighbours : they have nothing like a correct notion how much they have to be pardoned for. Now the indifference of such thoughtless men may make them seem mirthful and gay ; but it can never be a source of real cheerfulness : whereas he who sincerely thinks over his sins, and by the grace of God sincerely forsakes them, he has a thought of consolation in store for every unemployed and wakeful hour : he may indulge and dwell upon the hope of being pardoned at the last day, and coming, at last, to God's eternal joy. It is not possible, in the nature of things, for one who has this strong upon his mind, not to be cheerful and light of heart, compared with what he would be otherwise. He will naturally "serve the Lord his God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all " spiritual blessings.

Moreover, true penitence is the very course to secure and multiply to yourselves the enjoyment of all innocent earthly blessings. The thousand reasons for satisfaction and cheerfulness, which our Maker has so bountifully scattered around us—fine weather, fruitful seasons, wonderful works of nature or of man, all the comforts and conveniences of life, even the kindness of friends and relations—tell for something, when the mind is at ease, and disposed to be thankful : otherwise they are either hardly noticed or come mixed with much of bitterness. But the only sure way to have your mind *constantly* at ease—the only way to be, *habitually*, thankful—is to fix your thoughts on *Heaven* : to look at things with a *Christian* eye : to be aware, by God's grace, how little one deserves and so to be always prepared for thankfulness, wondering, inwardly in your heart, that the righteous Judge of Heaven and earth should prove, daily and hourly, so kind to one of whom He knows so much evil. I say, inwardly in your heart : for these are feelings not rashly to be talked of, lest they spend themselves in mere talk. A deep sense of one's own unworthiness, and a disposition to receive whatever good happens as a token of God's mercy, prepared for the penitent in Christ—this is the *root* of Christian cheerfulness, enabling a thoughtful person to enjoy things around him in a way which he could not else have imagined ; but being the *root*, it lies deep and hidden—it will not bear to be rudely exposed, shown and boasted of in all companies. It is enough, if God sees it in the heart, and attentive observers know it by its fruits : by the frank, kind, and open manner in which such a person will enjoy and communicate the common pleasures and accommodations of life ; by his watching to be thankful, both to God and man ; by his good tempered way of making the best of whatever happens that is irksome and unpleasant ; by bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things.

These, and other such as these, are symptoms of a joy truly devout, more to be trusted than much talking, even among men's intimate friends, of what

passes in their own mind and conscience. Not that words can do no good, but the matter, I believe, stands nearly as follows. Take care, first of all that your joy in God makes you benevolent, thankful, contented, charitable in your ways; and then your words, without any study or any particular care of yours, will show what you are, and do the good you wish for. "For out of the abundance of the heart," our Saviour has told us, "the mouth speaketh."

To go on his way rejoicing, then, appears to be the privilege of a sincere penitent, both for the deep and solid comfort which his devout thoughts bring with them and also because the mind of such an one, being comparatively at rest and ease, is more open to the many marks of God's fatherly care, by which we are surrounded on every side; and because, knowing his own unworthiness, he silently confesses that every mercy on him is a wonder.

In such proportion as men have arrived, really, soberly, and practically, at this temper, so far, they may hope, they are sharers in that heavenly grace, which St. Paul has mentioned as a great part of the Kingdom of God, that is to say, "Joy in the Holy Ghost." And let a man's circumstances be what they will—let his mind be ever so clouded for the time, where there lies, at the bottom of all, the reasonable hope of a good conscience in Christ Jesus, there, you may be sure, is this joy also.

And it is men's duty, as well as their privilege: a duty not simply to be cheerful (for wicked men may be so for a time, and children and thoughtless persons are so generally, and so are the riotous and intemperate in some sense, while their fit of gaiety lasts), but cheerfulness, so far as it is a Christian duty, is well and exactly expressed in the Collect for the day: "Cheerfully to accomplish those things which God would have done," is the exact notion of Christian cheerfulness. It is the same as being "fervent in spirit, serving Christ"; it is the same as "doing what we do *heartily*, as to the Lord, and not unto men"; that is to say, for God's sake, and not for any praise or reward that is to be had in this world.

Whoever in earnest is so minded will obey God's commandments with a certain alacrity, like a loyal soldier in the presence of his king, employed on some honourable service: he will not get through it like a burthen and a task, but will take a pride (if I may so speak) in doing it as well as ever he can.

You see at once that such cheerfulness is very unlike mere bodily spirits: they, in truth, very often tell just the contrary way. To be naturally very gay and lively proves very hurtful to many persons, and hinders them from doing what God would have done. Christian cheerfulness is then most perfect, when people exert themselves sweetly and patiently, in spite of feebleness and natural dejection.

Again, it is not to be judged of hastily, whether it be in yourself or in others. Some men are eager and earnest for a while, as long as religion, or some point in religion, has something new to strike their fancy with; and this may look at first like Christian cheerfulness, but indeed is a very different thing. Christian cheerfulness, as was just now said, is more like the spirit of a soldier, who has more to learn, than simply how to meet danger. It is easy in comparison to do that, in the tumult and hurry of battle, which of themselves help to keep up the spirits. But the faithful Christian, like the loyal soldier, must take cheerfully whatever station, whatever employment, his master assigns him, let it be never so lonely and wearisome, never so unaccountable to his judgment. He may not give up his active obedience to his Maker, when things seem most against him, and he appears least to get on: remembering always that prudence and consideration is a part of that active obedience.

Is this, think you, too much to require of weak men in a bad world? Do not say so till you have first tried what will take place in your own mind and heart, upon your turning to God so far as to have a reasonable hope that you are sincere in His service. I say a reasonable and *scriptural* hope; a hope grounded on God's Word, not on flattering fancies of men: such a hope as you cannot have, till by the help of God's Holy Spirit you have fairly begun to break yourself in earnest of all your wilful and habitual sins. Exactly in the same measure that you do this, you may reasonably hope (if no disease of body or mind hinder) to feel a sort of satisfaction in God's presence, like the satisfaction which a faithful servant feels, when he knows that his master is looking on his well-meant endeavours. This will make your hours of prayer welcome, and more especially those spent in the Church, and at the altar: since there and then it is that Christ has promised to draw nearest to His servants. This will make you watchful and kind in your family: little trifles will not vex you, whilst you are busied, as in God's sight, doing your best for the souls entrusted to you. This will help you to be fervent in business, yet to feel all the while above it; and to be nobly negligent of tempting and dangerous pleasures. Finally, this joy in God, having accompanied you through life, will help you to die the death of a Christian. But remember, this whole chain of blessings is lost, except you keep hold of the first link; and that link is practical amendment. "The Kingdom of God is" first "righteousness," then "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Chapter IX

Saul of Tarsus

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"*Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughters,*" &c.—*Acts ix. 1-3.*

Every one goes his own way; every creature after its kind.

The Ethiopian Treasurer, having obtained all he desired—having gained more than a whole world in that desert place, "went on his way rejoicing." Philip, having finished one work, instantly betakes himself to another. He does not become a hanger-on in the palace of his powerful convert. From Ashdod, the first town he reached on his return, all the way to Cæsarea, his home, he preached the Gospel in every city. A faithful servant, not hiding but exercising his talent, he was not content with the successful accomplishment of his errand to the desert place, but took advantage of his return journey to scatter the seed of the Kingdom in all the towns of the south. Saul, too, on his part, acting according to his nature, is as busy as the rest. When last we saw him, he was acquiescing eagerly in the martyrdom of Stephen (viii. 1); and now, after a considerable interval, he appears again, still bent on getting new victims. Perhaps, when the Christians were either driven away from Jerusalem, or concealed there, he found his occupation gone, and determined to find a new hunting-field.

Damascus was a great city, only about one hundred and forty miles distant. Many Jews resided permanently there; and probably some of the fugitives from Jerusalem had recently reached it in quest of a refuge. It is intimated in a subsequent verse (13) that believing Jews, who had left Jerusalem after Stephen's death, informed Ananias of Saul's arrival.

Damascus is the oldest city known to history still flourishing. It has a population of 250,000. Travellers describe with enthusiasm the marvellous beauty and

salubrity of its site. A bright rapid river, flowing from the slopes of the eastern Lebanon range, divides into several branches in the plain. Soon after passing the city these streams are absorbed, and never reach an outfall in any sea.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings." The instigator and manager of the first martyrdom has not *yet* changed; he *still* breathes out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Jesus, but will not do so much longer now. This part of his course is near an end; this is the last journey he will undertake as the waster of the Church. The days of his rebellion are numbered; the hour of his conversion is on the wing. He is still the persecutor; but a little while, and he will persecute no more. After this day, all his days, he will be persecuted, until, like the rest of the martyrs, he is sent up in a fiery chariot to join the company of the crowned saints.

Saul demanded from the high priest a commission empowering him to require the assistance of the synagogue authorities in Damascus in prosecuting there his work of blood. From his own lips, at a subsequent stage, we learn that this demand was successful; he went to Damascus "with authority," and not as an adventurer on his own account. By connivance of the Roman governor, the Jewish ecclesiastical council were permitted within certain limits to rule their own countrymen according to their own laws; and it appears that their jurisdiction extended in some form to the persons of Jews residing in foreign cities.

The commission granted by the high priest bore "that if he found any of this way," he should bring them bound to Jerusalem. We have here a new designation of the Christian faith. It is called *the way*, and those who believe it are said to be *of the way*. The expression in the same sense occurs in three other places of the Acts: "But divers spake evil of the way" (xix. 9); "And the same time there arose no small stir about the way" (xix. 23); "Felix, having more perfect knowledge of the way" (xxiv. 22). From a comparison of these passages in their context it may be clearly seen that "the way" was a specific designation of the Christian system.

Two questions spring here: Who gave the Christians that name? and, Why was it given? I think it is not a nickname imposed by enemies, but a significant designation adopted by themselves. It may indeed have been either voluntarily adopted by themselves, and thereafter employed by enemies as a term of reproach; or, conversely, employed by adversaries as a reproach, and ultimately accepted by themselves.

In the use of the term there may have been something of the nature of a cipher, used for purposes of concealment. It seems not improbable that the early disciples, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," might adopt, as their distinguishing title, the first constituent of that blessed Trinity. The word would be very precious in those troubled times. Christ was their way to the Father; faith in Him was their way to pardon and peace. "The way" in those times was their path across the wilderness, and their entrance into rest.

The term "Methodist" has been similarly employed in recent British history; and it is interesting to notice, although the English terms do not reveal the circumstance, that the same Greek word is the root of both epithets.

Women were not exempt: when and where have they been exempt, when persecution for Christ's sake was raging? From the beginning women have followed the Saviour in His suffering, and suffered for His sake.

The authorized agent was charged to bring the prisoners to Jerusalem for trial.

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from Heaven." We are approaching the crisis now. I

think this was, and was intended to be, the most striking and important individual conversion between Christ's Ascension and His return to judge the world. In its results, direct and indirect, it is the largest single fruit that has yet been gathered from the tree of righteousness that the Lord by His Death and Resurrection planted in the world.

As we approach the turning-point—the meeting-place, we stand in awe. For Christians this spot is holy ground. Like the three disciples on the mount, we fear as we enter the cloud: for here the Redeemer is transfigured, and displays more of His glory than mortal eye may easily bear.

From a comparison of this narrative with the accounts of the same event given subsequently by St. Paul in his public apologies, it results that while his companions heard a voice, Saul only distinguished the articulate speech of a Person; and that while they all fell to the earth at the first appearance of the light, the rest of the company soon rose to their feet again, while Saul continued prostrate to hear the word of the Lord. All the company beheld the light with which the risen Jesus that day clothed Himself as with a garment; but Saul alone saw the Divine Person Who wore that robe of glory. All heard a sound; but he alone felt the word as a two-edged sword penetrating his joints and marrow. Similar distinctions occur in our day. One is taken, and another left. A thousand may hear the word of the Kingdom, and the Kingdom come in power to only a single soul.

Here the Lord takes unto Himself His mighty power and reigns. He subdues and leads captive the greatest enemy of His Throne. He makes openly a show of Jewish unbelief in the person of its chosen champion, and uses the captive then as an instrument to promote His own design. The Lord had need of human energy and genius in its highest measure—of a moral power that sweeps all lighter things before it in whatever direction it may move like a river in flood—of Hebrew lore and Greek culture blended together in one capacious mind—of all these the Lord had need for the work of the Kingdom; and sovereignly He seized the vessel which contained them all in fullest measure, that He might employ it as He employed the ancient prophet, “to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jer. i. 10).

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

BY REV. WILLIAM BATHGATE, D.D.

“Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter,” &c.—Acts ix. 1-6.

I should think the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is the most important event of its kind that has ever happened in the history of the Christian Church. The immense results that have followed this conversion can be revealed only on the judgment day and through eternity.

There are a few circumstances in Saul's life, prior to this Damascus scene, which you must take into account in order to the better understanding of the scene itself. I dwell not on the make of him as a man, his fire, his impetuosity, his uprightness, his balancedness amid all the fervour of his temperament, his logical faculty, his manifold capacity of seeing far, and feeling keenly and deeply, of being swayed up to the pitch of enthusiasm by what he believed to be duty. It was only with a man of a certain mental and moral mould that all this could happen. I remind you that he was the son of a Pharisee, that he had been trained in a Jewish family, that at his mother's knee he had drunk in, with all the faith and eagerness of childhood, the histories of Joseph and Moses, of David and Daniel—that he

doubtless had besought her again and again and again, to tell him once more about those persons whose names were household words in every Jewish family. I doubt not that young Saul nursed with these sublime stories his heart's desire, to do some day, signal service in behalf of a Judaism so adorned. I remind you that he had spent his boyhood in Tarsus. He was Saul of Tarsus, "no mean city." Tarsus was famous for its culture, indeed another Athens. It was also a place of much commerce. The atmosphere of the place was cosmopolitan, though doubtless heathen. The Greek, the Roman, and the Jew were all there, with their civilizations as well as their religions. To any one who remembers that Saul was destined to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, of the world, the messenger of God to any man, Jew or Gentile, Greek or Roman, the place of his birth and boyhood will have a peculiar significance. I remind you that Saul went early up to Jerusalem, that he was brought up as a student at the feet of Gamaliel, that "after the most straitest sect" of their religion, he had been taught a Pharisee, and had lived a Pharisee. He was, touching the ceremonies of the law, a most blameless, spotless man. There he is, then, in his prime, clean, fiery, ready for any piece of service in behalf of Judaism, a rising young man in the eye of all who knew him. Little did he know what a whirlwind awaited him! Little did he know the glorious calm that would succeed it! The Lord in Heaven knew it all.

In the first two verses of this narrative we have a most graphic picture of Saul as a persecutor of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Underlying this character, we have in Saul the representative of Pharisaism, the representative of an effete Judaism, a perverted Judaism, a Judaism that literally hated the Cross of Jesus Christ. This does not palliate his persecuting spirit. Still, in fairness to him you must remember he thought he was doing God service. He found out, by and by, that he had been a blasphemer, but meanwhile he was ready—as he imagined for righteous reasons—to inflict tremendous penalties on the sheep of Christ. Indeed, a very short time before this journey to Damascus he had given his consent to the death of Stephen. He had stood by guarding the clothes of the murderers of this first martyr. He had looked on consentingly. He had heard the prayers of the bruised and battered Stephen, so like the prayers of his dying Lord. I cannot tell whether the better heart of Saul was touched by the nobility of Stephen's soul as he died for Christ. Probably it was, for a moment; but he held on his terrible course (Acts viii. 3). And here we have him requesting a commission to go to Damascus for the express purpose of prosecuting the work of persecution. He would do this work openly, systematically, on principle, and with a dreadful thoroughness. "Men or women," he would "bring them bound to Jerusalem." He would bring them in triumph. What will not even a noble nature do under the tyrannic sway of a false principle, of mistaken zeal for God!

Saul of Tarsus is arrested when near Damascus by the light and the voice from Heaven. Just when Damascus, the oldest city in the world, appeared in the distance, and the spirit of the persecutor is inflamed by the near prospect of success in his mission, a light from Heaven, a great light, a light above the brightness of the sun at noon, strikes him to the earth, strikes him to the earth in the full possession of all his senses save the one sense of sight: *it* is gone. What a moment of bewilderment and terror! A great suspicion rises within him that he is on a wrong errand, that he is fighting against God and not for God. And a voice says unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" It is not, why persecutest thou the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth? but, "why persecutest thou Me?" The Lord in Heaven and from Heaven undertakes the cause of His saints, considers them Himself. What is done to them, against them, or for them, is done to Him, against Him, or for Him. Saul's battle was with Christ. Long afterwards, well

did he understand the identity of Jesus and His own. Saul must have felt that he was in the grasp of one mightier than himself. He has courage, strength left to ask, "Who art Thou, Lord?" He is wishful to understand his real position. Saul feels he must be wrong, but he wishes to know definitely against whom he is contending. Things have come to a serious pass. "And the Lord said, I am Jesus, Whom thou persecutest." There is the terrible truth down upon him now, and it pricks and wounds his conscience, even as the instrument behind the kicking, refractory oxen wounds them. This is the very Jesus Who was crucified, Who rose from the dead, Who ascended into Heaven, and now addresses Saul face to face. The once despised has sent the shaft of terror through the very heart of Saul. We must distinguish between the light of the miracle and the light, the terrible light, of Saul's conduct as a sinner and a persecutor. The miracle was a small matter compared with that. Saul's conscience is now like the wounded ox, and it is hard to bear. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Arrested by the light and the voice from Heaven, the shaft from the hand of a persecuted Saviour strikes the conscience of Saul of Tarsus, and he feels that the accusation brought against him is true, is a truth working greater terror in his heart than the miracle striking him to the earth. He finds it hard to struggle with the holy word, convincing him, there and then, that he is a sinner of no ordinary magnitude.

After Saul in his astonishment and terror has realized his true position, as a man most dreadfully mistaken and as a rebel against Jesus Christ, he asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is impossible for any man to say, to a thought, how much is in this question on the lips of Saul of Tarsus. It is at once most significant and partially indefinite. It is the cry of a strong soul in its great crisis, and of a man so bewildered as not to be likely to think of his spiritual necessities with very great precision and exactitude. You must give even a truly anxious soul a little time to do that. We, after much reflection and many a calm hour, can sum up our spiritual wants in such terms as, forgiveness of all the past, regeneration of heart, sanctification of character, and the hope of eternal life. But do you imagine that a soul in Saul's position pointed this question with all the precision of a theologian, to the past and to the present, and to the future temporary and eternal? I think not. Indeed, one of the features of this whole narrative, bespeaking confidence in its inspiration and reliability, is just the absence of the doctrinal ripeness which you find in the Epistles of Paul, written long after this sore struggle out of great darkness into dawn, and into dawn only, not into doctrinal noon. St. Luke is a faithful historian, and reports the great event just as it was likely to happen. I understand this inquiry as a most intense one, and yet as more or less general. Saul felt he had been wrong altogether, and that he must be and that he must do something very different, and he appeals to the Lord Whom he has persecuted to tell him what he must do. This question, doubtless, points quite as decidedly to his duty in relation to his future life, as to where and how he was to obtain forgiveness of the past. It seems to me as if Saul allowed the multitude of questions crowding in his soul to sum themselves up in this petition for all the light, all the guidance he needed in his circumstances. "Lord, I look to Thee now; tell me what to do." How much or how little of the light of saving truth had entered Saul's mind when he put this question we cannot tell. Nor is the narrative particular in stating at what moment of time Saul was converted. It is eighteen centuries, brethren, since this question rose from the troubled soul of Saul of Tarsus, and yet, it is so real, so lifelike, we could believe that the whole thing happened yesterday. One circumstance which keeps this scene fresh in the consciousness of the Christian Church, is the perpetual repetition of these spiritual events in the experience of souls. Do any of you understand this well, in the light of your personal experience?

The condition in which Saul entered Damascus is worthy of attention, especially when you contrast it with the manner in which he expected to go into the city. Damascus is about one hundred and thirty six miles distant from Jerusalem. Saul had no sooner obtained his commission from the high-priest than he set out with a company of men for Damascus. He pushed forward like a man bent on doing his work quickly and well. He is, as he thinks, doing the God of the Fathers service. He has all his plans of procedure perfected—the friends in Damascus who will help, selected; the details just need to be filled in. We have already considered his arrest by the Lord Jesus. The poor saints in Damascus need not dread a foe in him now. He is harmless; he is blind. He has perplexities enough himself. He is led by the hand and brought into Damascus, the man that led him confounded, the people in the streets confounded, himself most of all confounded. He is taken to the house of one Judas. Such is the entry of Saul into Damascus, unpromising enough, and yet far more promising than if his own purposes had been fulfilled. So it often is with us.

Saul was three days without sight, and he neither ate nor drank. He must have been very lonely those three days. The Jews would have done with him now. He could serve them no longer. The Christians would be afraid of him yet. He fasted and prayed. Many things would crowd in upon him. The recollections of his early years, the passages in the ancient Scriptures which he had never understood, but which were beaming with new light, now, the thoughts of his own cruelty, the last looks of Stephen, and many other circumstances crowded in upon him. Those three days were equal to three years, in an ordinary history or life.

Mark, very specially, the intimation given to Ananias that Saul of Tarsus was in the house of Judas praying, "For behold, he prayeth." We can only infer what were the petitions of Saul's prayer. I am sure he cried to the Lord of all our senses for sight, dear sight. I am sure he cried for inward sight, light to the soul. I am sure he cried now, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I am sure he cried for a full answer to the question he had already put to the Lord Jesus. He would have the germ of a great purpose in his great soul, now thoroughly broken, and he would pray for instruction as to the future before the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Saul's Conversion

BY REV. J. OSWALD DYKES, D.D.

"Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter," &c.—Acts ix. 1-9.

That blessed war of aggression which Jesus Christ wages upon the evil world is a war which is made to maintain itself. Christ's soldiers are His captured enemies. Every soul won from resistance to the Cross is marked at once with the cross-badge, and sent into the field to win others. Of this the most notable instance in Christian history is the conversion of Saul. Jesus Christ never encountered a bitterer or an abler foe; Jesus Christ never won a mightier captain for His army of light. Our narrative has brought us to one of the great days of the Church. What happened that noon-day near Damascus was the most signal intervention in her affairs which Christ has effected since He went to Heaven. It did more than any other event after Pentecost to determine the current and colour the future of Christianity. It was the winning for the young enterprise of a soldier, who by his Antiochian ministry was in a few years to found the first Christian Church in heathendom; whose mission trip to Pisidia was to raise the question of Gentile liberty settled at the Jerusalem Synod; whose second mission tour was to open to

Christ the doors of Greece ; whose third was destined, through his arrest as an apostate Jew and his appeal to Nero, to conduct him to the very centre and capital of the imperial heathen world.

This historical importance of the fact, that such a man suddenly abandoned the Pharisaic party who opposed the new sect, and became the Church's chief Apostle and foremost preacher, amply justifies the detail with which St. Luke has related the entire story. Not only the apparition on the road, but the three days' blindness, and the visit of Ananias, all of which formed so many stages in the conversion, are reported at length. To the first of these stages, however, a quite special importance attaches itself. The immediate occasion of Saul's change of life was quite as exceptional as the change itself was eventful. This was not the ordinary case of a man led to believe in Jesus through the evidence of others, or through the testimony of the Church, or through the pressure of spiritual need. It was not even an extraordinary case to which there are few parallels ; it was a unique case which has no parallel. The agent in the conversion of this man was not a mortal man, his fellow ; it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Christ directly called His misguided persecutor to Himself ; He called him in person. For the apparition which confronted Saul on the Damascus road was no inward vision, such as afterwards appeared to Ananias, no dreamlike impression, as if the inquisitor saw what was not there bodily to be seen, or heard words which did not really stir the air. It was not a seeing and hearing only " in the Spirit," as when John the seer saw mystic sights in Patmos. It was (as I read the records) a veritable return of Him Who went up from the Mount of Olives, to show Himself once more in His risen humanity to the eyes, and speak with His own lips in the ears, of a mortal. Such a personal manifestation of Him Whom the Heavens have received is, I suppose, solitary in Christian history. The evidence for it therefore is, as it needs to be, exceptionally strong.

Possibly it may be due to the emphasis so justly laid by the sacred records on this solitary appearance of the ascended Master, that very little has been told us of the internal history of the conversion. Its outward details we know ; the great objective cause of it, the glorious One Whose face illumined, Whose voice thrilled into new life the soul of the Pharisee, has been left conspicuous—a figure of light—in the foreground. But we are not told, what we should have greatly liked to know, through what preparatory workings of soul the persecutor had been prepared for such a crisis, or what struggles accompanied the new birth of a nature so powerful as his, and filled up these three days of lonely and blind silence. As we follow the impatient traveller down to the moment when that sudden light prostrated him, and as we dwell upon those dark hours of secret thought through which he passed in the house of Judas, we can hardly help feeling it to be strange (though it may well be believed to be wise) that so little has been told us of the interior and spiritual history of this grandest of all conversions. Yet, let us check ourselves. Who can tell the spiritual processes of any conversion ? Or why should we pry too curiously into that mysterious and sacred place, where, under cover of darkness, the Spirit of God broods over a soul whom He will renew of His great grace into the life and likeness of the Eternal Son ?

At the same time, the general nature of the change which unexpectedly passed upon Saul, can be pretty well made out from what we know of the man, both before and after it.

Down to the moment when the glory smote him, this man was a Hebrew of the most extreme type. A Benjamite of pure blood, and by birth a Pharisee, he had been educated in the chief rabbinical school of the holy city. In ardent study, in knowledge of patristic traditions, in zeal for the God of Israel and for His chosen

race, in the strict observance of Pharisaic religion, he claims to have outstripped all his contemporary fellow-students under Gamaliel's tuition. With that intensity which was always his leading characteristic, this young Jew became a red-hot zealot for Judaism; this Pharisee followed Pharisaic prescriptions with the "most strait" observance. So far as punctilious keeping of Mosaic ritual and the customary piety of his time could go, his "righteousness, which was of the law, was blameless." Nor was this, in his case, as in the case of so many in his time, a solemn farce, cloaking secret immorality. This young man's soul was true, and it was bent on being righteous with its whole might. He thirsted after righteousness with a noble thirst which only very noble natures know. So far, therefore, as he knew or understood what would please God, he laboured in utter sincerity to please Him. But the law, as Judaism expounded it, was a very shallow thing, and the sort of righteousness which it required was quite within the reach of any man in earnest. Saul was singularly free by temperament from the lower appetites. The currents of his nature ran towards a rigorous and proud morality. To such a man Pharisaic virtue was easy. He kept the letter of the law. He observed every detail of ritual. He shunned Gentile defilement. He boasted in his knowledge of God's will. He thanked God he was not as other men. Such a school of morality, a morality of the letter and not of the spirit, is a very hotbed of pride. These were the days in which young Saul was "alive without the law," going about to establish his own blameless righteousness, and trusting to his own merits as a "gain," in which, beyond others, he might safely boast.

It is easy to see that to such a man the preaching of repentance and faith in the Cross of a crucified Deliverer from sin must have been gall and wormwood. The new sect insisted that Saul and his school had misread their Bibles and misunderstood God; that their boasted righteousness was nothing; that they had no less need to repent and confess their sins than other men; and that, so far from being favourites of Heaven or children of God, they could only enter into God's Kingdom by the help of One Whom they and their agents had persecuted unto death. To Saul, as an orthodox Jew, all this must have appeared to be flat blasphemy against Moses and the God of Moses. To Saul, as a self-satisfied and righteous Pharisee, it was like a personal insult. Accordingly, with his usual impetuosity, he flung himself into the work of stamping out a heresy which, on public and personal grounds alike, he had such good reason to hate. He led the inquisition after suspected persons. He voted, as we have seen, for the death of the arrested. He hunted the sect from town to town. He volunteered his services to the Sanhedrin as a commissioner to purge even Damascus from the taint of Nazaritim.

All this while I think it probable that Saul's mind was not quite at ease. It may be too much to say that he lashed himself into greater rage against the new "Way," or pushed his restless hostility to an extreme, just on purpose to crush down secret misgivings which began to stir in his bosom. Nor can we now discover how far the holy face of dying Stephen, lit up with the light of God, may have haunted and troubled the memory of the man who guarded the robes of the witnesses. But at least one can gather from those first suggestive words which Jesus spoke to him, while he lay prone, with muffled face, upon the road, that all had not been quite serene in the soul of the persecutor. Oxen do not kick back against the prickings of the ox-goad, without feeling pain and restlessness. Jesus must have been before this trying to guide into the right "way." His furious and mistaken assailant. A few words heard in controversy with Stephen, it might be, or some meek victim's patience, a secret craving of Saul's own deepest heart, or a breath in quiet hour from the Spirit of God—something must have stirred within this man, who appeared to other men so resolute, and who told himself that he was so unques-

tionably in the right, a suspicion or a fear that, possibly, after all, the Nazarenes might not be altogether wrong. Against such prickings Saul had kicked. Who, from his own experience, cannot understand Saul's case? To whom has it never happened that, when he felt well contented with his religious state, and pleased to think he was so near to Heaven's favour, some ghastly doubt looked up of a sudden to trouble him—some fear which refused to be reasoned away, that after all his standing might not turn out to be so very safe, or his religion so very perfect? Such occasional misgivings, promptly repelled, leave no trace behind, nor do they alter in the least the main purpose and course of a man's life. It is possible that Saul scarcely admitted to himself that he had misgivings. He certainly would have admitted them to no one else. His persecuting ardour burned none the less hot for them. Having caught sight of that scene, one of earth's loveliest, where the old delicious city of Damascus gleams white by its watercourses among green orchards, ravishing the eyes of the traveller weary with days of toilsome march across untilled wastes: having, I say, caught, a little before noon, his first glimpse of this, from the heights which bound upon the south the gem-like valley of the Abana, Saul pressed on, long past the usual hour for halt, pressed on beneath the fiercest midday sun, eager only to do the God of Israel service by cleansing so fair a bit of earth from those who were perverting the faith of Jehovah's chosen ones.

Suddenly, in a blaze of glory which drowned the sun at noon, the Man appeared Whom Saul believed to be a dead impostor. The shock which this apparition gave to his whole nature was as severe as it was sudden. Everything speaks of instantaneous and utter collapse. His physical frame felt it in being cast powerless to the earth, in the blinding of his eyes through excess of light, and in the feebleness under which for days he lay. It is to be traced also in those few and timid words which he was able to stammer out: "Who art Thou, Lord?" "What shall I do, Lord?" These are the words of one who is broken down, not in physical fright only, but by a blow which has snapped the strength of old pride on which all his former life rested, and thus for the moment crushed the man into the helplessness of a child. When we see him rise, staggering, groping, humbly letting his scared attendants guide him, confused and bewildered, to his lodgings, we have a picture in his outward of his inward state. The discovery of one single fact had undermined in a moment the whole foundation on which Saul had been building from his boyhood—was now working hard in his manhood. That fact was this—That the Nazarene is risen: is God! It took three whole days and nights of solitary mental struggle and spiritual agony before the strong man worked his way, by God's help, to the cordial acceptance of this fact, and of all that it meant for him; yet, from the very first instant on the road, he must have felt, at least, that it made his faith, his religion, his pride, his whole life, his very self, an utter and sheer mistake. If Jesus is the Lord, he, Saul, had always been hopelessly and fatally wrong. Nay, it may take more than three days' solitude, it may take years in Arabia, and a world of thinking, before he will quite recover himself, or build up a new life into such strength and compactness as the old one had. But at least the old is shattered at a blow, and for ever. It rises, it lives, no more. One look into a dead man's—what do I say?—into a living Man's face, has done that. Jesus lives, and Saul dies. Gamaliel's pupil, Sanhedrin inquisitor, blameless Pharisee, slayer of Stephen—this old man is dead.

What those meditations were which filled up the three days before he recovered himself sufficiently to pray, we do not certainly know. I think we shall not greatly err, however, if we conceive the chief experience of these three days to have been the discovery of a spiritual law, which condemned his legal righteousness as (in his own words) "loss," and "dung." Nor is it very hard to guess how this discovery

might be made. Saul needed no man now to tell him that his way of pleasing God had been a hideous blunder, since it had led him to persecute God's Christ. But if such punctilious legal obedience as he had been straining after was proved to be consistent with the grossest possible breach of the law in its spirit, then Saul's dialectic was acute enough to see that it must be the spirit, and not the letter, of the law in which the secret of righteousness has to be sought. Nay, there was little need for dialectic. The spiritual sense of the man, purged now from pride and illumined by the Spirit of God, saw what false education and self-righteousness had hitherto kept him from seeing—that "the law is spiritual." The moment that spiritual law of love to God and man, a law of heart-motives and not overt acts, came to him, sin revived, and he died. Back through all his past life his memory must have gone ranging during that awful interval. Bit by bit what he had called "righteousness" became to his astonished soul ungodliness, pride, uncharity, sin; what he had called "gain" appeared utter loss. In the end, when the need of atoning blood, of divine forgiveness, and of a new spirit of life grew within his soul into clear consciousness, he began to look up out of his prostration and collapse. God began to reveal His Son in him. Hopeful desires formed themselves. His mind reverted for help to the names of those very disciples whom he had come to arrest. In a sweet vision he seemed to see one of these friends of Jesus come in to him, where he lay in his darkness, to give him light. Inner light, more even than the light of the eyes, his soul craved; and, grown meek now through all this prolonged spiritual struggle, behold, he prayed! He Whose first coming in person, by the way, had brought judgment with it, darkness, and feebleness, and almost death, came now, a second time, by the gentle words of His servant and the blessed sacraments of His Church. So coming, He brought light and peace and the hope of a new and better life.

Conversion

BY RIGHT REV. JOHN ARMSTRONG, D.D.

"As he journeyed, he came near Damascus," &c.—Acts ix. 3, 4.

Nothing can be more opposite than the earlier and the later history of St. Paul. We seem almost to be looking on two different men; and though on a closer survey we may trace the same traits of character, such as zeal, warmth, earnestness, and sincerity, yet we feel that the language of Scripture has in his case unusual force, which describes the member of Christ as becoming a "new creature in Christ."

Let us then consider a few of the more striking points in the conversion of St. Paul. And, first of all, with such a scene before our thoughts, we cannot but be led at once to confess the power of God over the heart, and the love which gives the motion to that power. Who else could have turned backward the strong current of a man's whole life? Who else could have made a man in a moment adore what he was persecuting, embrace what he would have crushed, call that light which he had believed to be darkness, cast aside as deadly error what he had held to be living truth, give up everything that he held most dear, the principles, opinions of a life, that had grown with his growth, that had strengthened with his strength, and to espouse instead what he abhorred, what he was bent on scattering like the chaff before the wind? Who else could have made the bitter enemy of the Cross in a moment fall on his face and confess the Crucified, in a moment place himself among the persecuted, worship the Object of his enmity, his contempt, and scorn, and tear from his heart whatever had taken root?

The power of Christ, the power of God, was alone sufficient for such a work. It was a work of divine power and love, these two working together for the conversion of a soul, and for that of a multitude of souls through him. To turn the heart, to turn and wrench it from all old objects of desire, all old principles, views, feelings, motives, to turn it so that it should see all things in another light, and be itself quite changed, quite altered, fashioned as it were anew, is indeed within the power of God alone. If we ever find that we need to be turned and changed, that our hearts are going after wrong things, taking a wrong course, not loving what we should love, not shunning what should be shunned, but running on in a wrong channel and filled with wrong desires, then in any struggles to return to holier ways we should first of all lift up our heart and say, "Turn Thou me, O Lord, and so shall I be turned." We have but little power over ourselves; even when we wish to break from sin, we feel often as it were bound hand and foot, unable to move, looking to the better part, but wanting the will and strength to follow it. But what must it be when the very wish for better things has to be got as well as the power of doing better? What must it be to take the heart as if by violence from evil things, which it both wished for and pursued, and to make it wish for and pursue the very opposite, the very contrary things?

We see then in the case of St. Paul, so greatly changed as to abandon all he honoured, and with a different heart to honour all that he had spurned, the manifest working of the power and of the love of God. But in observing these gracious operations of the Lord, we also see that in the conversion of the Apostle *miraculous* power was put forth. The conversion must be numbered among the miracles of grace. Suddenly there was a light, a voice from Heaven. Suddenly the Apostle, struck by the glory of the light, fell down "trembling and astonished," blinded by the exceeding brightness of the light, "above the brightness of the sun"; convinced that the Lord Jesus Himself, the Holy One Whom he had denied, was indeed the Everlasting Son of the Everlasting God, and that the voice was His.

And it is deeply important at the present time to bear in mind the *miraculous* character of the scene, lest men now, hardened in sin and going against God, should be expecting some wonderful and sudden change like this, lest any of us should get to think that this is an example of the ordinary operation of Christ's power and love in ordinary times; and that when God is graciously purposed to convert a soul it must be sudden and instantaneous, with some wonderful circumstances, some wonderful vision shining before the soul, some words from Heaven, some marvellous and surprising scene. We must not expect in our day to hear of men being changed after the manner of St. Paul. It was a case by itself, unlike others, remarkable and miraculous; and it by no means represents the way in which God is wont ordinarily to call sinners and wanderers to Himself. There is always a taste for wonders, and men think to see the wonders of old time acted over again before their eyes.

Others again, when their minds are strongly wrought and are under the influence of religious excitement, are apt to mistake their own heated feelings, their own sensations for the working of the grace of God, and to think that their own vehement and warm emotions at some particular time were the movements of the Spirit in their hearts; as if, because St. Paul was miraculously converted, and of course knew the time when the miracle was wrought, we were able in cases of modern conversion to be able distinctly to trace the influence of the Spirit and to chronicle the very hour and moment of its influence, excluding by such a view all those slower, more gentle and gradual operations of the Holy Ghost, which frequently occur in the ordinary condition of the Church.

Nay, we must not now think to be startled by hearing a voice from Heaven, and

seeing a wondrous light, nor must we think that all the spiritual changes in heart and character which God works in His great love must be done in a moment, and to a moment marked down by us. God's arm is not shortened. He can change us in many ways, He uses many ways in the changes which He at present works, sometimes startling the sinner suddenly, sometimes letting in the light upon his soul as slowly as the dawn breaks and the heavens begin to be streaked with a soft and hazy light. Sometimes He thunders; sometimes He speaks with the still small voice and in persuasive love. Sometimes it is but a word, a touch; sometimes He reasons long, and pleads with the sinner and works upon him by degrees, opening his mind to the truth even as He unfolds by degrees the leaves of the flower, until at last the very centre of the flower looks on the full glory of the sun.

Next we must remark, that the conversion of St. Paul was from professed unbelief and disbelief to a state of faith. It was a change from one system of religion, at one time the only true religion but then done away, to that of another system perfect and unchangeable, of which the former was but the shadow, the forerunner and the bud, the "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." It was not that he was converted from a godless to a godly life, from a life of open sin, lust, impurity, and vice, to a life of holiness, purity, and devotion. It was not that he professed the faith and after dishonouring it by worldly deeds was brought to adorn it with a holy and pious life. It was not that he confessed the truth and doctrine of Christ crucified, and was converted from an unworthy and corrupt confession of the truth to a living vital obedience to Christ's laws. No—St. Paul was altogether outside the Church, outside the Christian faith, the fold of Christ, outside the household of faith, unbaptized, having never tasted any of the gifts of the Spirit, rejecting the doctrine of the Cross, denying Christ to be the Lord, thinking Him a deceiver of the people, believing Christ's religion to be altogether false, a fraud and an imposture on the world, all the while a serious sincere disciple of the Church of Israel, not living a profligate and careless life, but being a strict observer of the law, one seeking to do God service, though in a mistaken way.

He required therefore to be brought to own that Jesus was the Christ, to receive the Spirit, and to be born of water and of the Spirit, and after such a change to obey the will of Jesus. He required to be brought to a confession that this Jesus was both Lord and God, the Author and Finisher of our faith, the one sufficient Sacrifice, the Lamb slain to take away the sin of the world, the Captain of our salvation Who giveth us the victory, the great Atonement, the good Shepherd by Whose death we live. It is one thing to deny Christ to be the Son of God altogether, it is another to confess Christ to be the Son of God though we despise His will and walk unrighteously, as if we confessed Him not. These are two different sins, both of them deadly ones, from the former of which all of us are freed, from the latter of which many of us require to be loosed. To be earnest in a wrong cause is not the same thing as to be unserious or unearnest in a right cause. In the one case we want to see what truth is, that we may love it; in the other case, knowing what is truth, we want to see the need of living up to the truth which we profess.

But still the Apostle's conversion, though it has many features peculiar to itself and without any parallel among ourselves, presses upon us this one great lesson, that God does convert the hearts of men and bring them whether out of professed and thorough unbelief, or the darkness of an evil life, which is a state of practical unbelief. Though indeed miraculous conversions happen not in our time, still hearts are changed and turned; and we have examples of those who after having held the truth in unrighteousness have been brought some in one way, some in another, by the infinite and undeserved mercy of God, to a state of sincere repent-

ance, to an earnest and zealous following of Christ. Thanks be to God we sometimes see in our day sinners awakened, the thoughtless drawn into thoughtful ways, the wild and riotous kneeling in penitence at the Saviour's feet, prodigals returning to their heavenly Father's home, the disobedient learning to obey, the godless seeking after God. These things still are done, and these things are the fruit of God's power and love at work among us at the present time.

Yea, if we did but listen out, not for the miraculous, but for that more ordinary voice of God which so often speaks in the sinner's heart, many of us who continue in our sins, and who are dishonouring our Saviour's name by our careless lives, would be rescued from the power of the world, would be snatched as brands from the burning, would be led to a sincere and earnest walk with God, would be roused from that spiritual slothfulness and sleep in which so many die, would be urged to put our hand to the plough with high purposes of devoting ourselves to the service of our Lord. Often and often does God call ; often and often does our Lord come to touch and renew unfaithful souls, to convert and turn the hearts of unthinking and worldly men ; often does God by accidents, by sicknesses, by worldly losses, by trials, by the death of friends, seek to make professing Christians who have let their earlier gifts die away, Christians in deed and in truth, Christians in real service, in real and living love towards Christ.

And yet often and often the call of God is stifled by other sounds, by the mirth and the bustle of the world. Often and often men start up for a moment when the call is fresh, have a few solemn and serious thoughts, and then turn back to their worldly ways, let go the Cross, sink down into carelessness and sleep, and allow the spirit of the world to bind and master them again. These are the things that grieve the Spirit and make the Angels weep. What more grievous than to see divine power and divine love despised, to behold men choosing death in the error of their ways, digging as it were their graves with their own hands, and with their own hands forging the instruments of their own destruction, when they might have life, mercy, pardon, blessing from Heaven, love and reconciliation with God !

If any of you, conscious that you have either forgotten God or have but a faint and slender faith ; if any of you have any religious impressions, any solemn thoughts, any movements in your soul that seem to lead you to better things ; follow the example of St. Paul, who exclaimed at once, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " and who instantly did what he was enjoined. Let not the sounds of Divine mercy be wasted on our ears. Many of us need conversion, many need to be renewed and changed in heart ; though once in baptism we became children of God through the operation of God therein, many of us have fallen from faithfulness as children, from all dutifulness towards our Father in Heaven, from all love, honour, true obedience to His laws. Shall we not then pray God to turn us by His Spirit, that the careless may give their hearts to holy things, that the impenitent may become repentant, that the pleasure-seekers may embrace the Cross and be crucified to the world, that the proud may be humbled, the covetous become bountiful, and the lovers of the world seekers of Christ's Kingdom ?

And if it should please God in His mercy to awaken us, to convert and change us, to give us a new heart and a new spirit, to renew the spirit of our minds, we must be careful to bring forth fruits meet for repentance ; it is for fruit that God looks ; it is not with mere agitation of heart, with mere beatings upon the breast, with tears and strong expressions of remorse, with thoughts concerning God however deep or warm, that God is content. All these are good as beginnings of a better state. It is good for us to feel hatred of sin and love towards God ; it is good for us to weep over our sins and to reproach ourselves strongly for our wasted years and wasted gifts ; it is good for us to burn with desire for the fulfilment of Christ's

law ; but these things make up but the first steps of an altered life, the first dawn of the better day ; we must not think all is well because we have made this good beginning ; fruit, fruit is what the Lord will look for when He comes, the fruits of repentance, the fruits of conversion, the fruits of faith and love, the peaceable fruit of righteousness, fruit unto holiness, the fruits of the Spirit. Bear this in mind, that ye must bring forth fruit, that ye must put yourselves wholly under Christ's yoke, that ye must do His will, keep His commandments, break off all evil habits, and completely give up yourselves to that which is pure and good.

Further still, there is need, in entering on such a course, to be on your guard against desponding and despairing thoughts, when this bearing forth of fruit is found hard and difficult, when old appetites, old tempers and disposition make a struggle to regain the throne which they once possessed. When we are first wakened up, first roused, first turned from darkness to light, we feel that we could do all things for Christ, that we could even die. The tide of feeling runs strongly at such a time ; but when the first glow of awakened zeal is past, and in a more ordinary mood we are called upon to battle with all the fretting or tempting circumstances of every-day life, with all the difficulties of religious service, then we are apt to be quite cast down as we recollect the warmth and ardour and strong purposes that so lately filled our hearts. A re-action takes place, and we think all things going the wrong way ; we feel vexed with ourselves, and disappointed, as we find out the weakness of our resolutions and the difficulty of preserving a Christian spirit even amid the little incidents and trials of common life ; we are apt to despair about our salvation, and to let our vessel go down the stream because the stream has somewhat baffled us for a time.

Now against all such desponding thoughts I pray you to strive ; be of good heart ; have faith ; though beaten back, again fight against the tide, again grasp the oar ; again summon up all your strength ; again pray for strength ; there is need of patience ; need of perseverance, need of sustained effort ; in time ye will gain the victory ; in time ye will reach the goal ; in time ye will obtain mastery over yourselves, and give good proof that the Lord has indeed changed your heart if ye will but persevere.

Kicking Against the Pricks

BY VERY REV. E. H. PLUMPTRE, D.D.

" *Who art Thou, Lord ?* " &c.—*Acts ix. 5.*

We do well to treasure up, whenever we can learn them, the facts that cluster round the turning-points in a great man's life ; the great critical moments which made him what he was, for good and evil, leaving an everlasting impress on his character. In proportion to the work which such a man has done in the world, as prophet, or lawgiver, or ruler, are we glad to know what were the inner sources of those great achievements ; what forces were at work, directing, in the wonderful providence of God, the whole current of his being. The thoughts which rise unbidden in his heart ; the words which are borne to his inward ear as from some human or Divine instructor ; the account he himself gives us of the facts of the great change—all these have an interest for us far greater than that which attaches to any record of merely outward events, even than that which we find in the greatest actions of the man himself.

Looking to St. Paul as simply one of the great men who have stamped their minds and characters on the history of the world ; seeing in him one whose in-

fluence has had a wider range, and lasted longer than that of any other man, however mighty or famous, the account which he gives of the process by which he became that which he actually was might well attract us, as being of immense significance. I need not dwell on what is so familiar to us all, as the fact that that process was one of sudden and startling change ; that all the strength and intensity of his nature were transferred in a moment from one camp in the great battle-field of faith to the other ; that he who was before a persecutor and a blasphemer, and an injurious, became a preacher of the faith he once destroyed. If the record of the conversion of St. Paul were simply that of an internal conflict, of growing and gathering convictions, of strange dreams and omens ; if it were as perplexing and uncertain as are the stories of the conversion of Constantine, it would still be, for all to whom the history of the world is not a sealed book, a page in it which they may not lightly pass over.

But if we believe that the change of belief and heart was not merely a human, but a Divine work : that the words which belong to it did not come into the man's heart by chance, but were spoken to his spirit by Him Who is the Eternal Word ; if we think of that which he beheld, not as one of the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, but as the revelation of the Son of Man, then I am sure we are bound to study the whole history with a profounder reverence, to examine into each single circumstance belonging to it, with the fullest conviction that there can be nothing idle or superfluous in it, nothing arbitrary or capricious. If in a simply human experience, as, for example, in Augustine's account of his conversion, we ask what relation the words or the thoughts to which a man traces some great convulsion in his whole nature bore to his previous life, to his habits of character ; if we seek to know what light they threw upon the past, what insight they gave him into the mysteries of his own being, what guidance for the future—then much more, infinitely more so, may we look for all this here. The Divine work must contain all, and more than all, the harmony, fitness, proportion, which we look for in the human. The words which were spoken were addressed to a given type of character, to a given state of feeling ; they went, as they were designed to go, straight to the man's heart of hearts as no other words whatever could have gone.

There is an apparent strangeness, brethren, in the account which is given by himself, and by St. Luke, of the facts of St. Paul's conversion, which makes it all the more necessary to bear this in mind. That strangeness, that startling simplicity and plainness, carries with it, I need hardly say, the evidence of its own truthfulness. The temptation to a dishonest, or even to a weak nature, would have been to raise all the circumstances of such a change to the height of what would seem to men stately, Divine, terrible. All familiar speech, all that drew its birth from the common experience of mankind, would have been carefully excluded. The tongues of men and of Angels would have seemed too feeble for so high a theme. There would have been the attempt to soar "into the third Heaven," and to speak the words which it is not "lawful," is not possible, "for man to utter." St. Paul's language is, we know, very different. He uses here, as always, "great plainness of speech." He tells us, indeed, of "the glory above the brightness of the sun" which shone round about him ; tells us how in that brightness he saw a form which others did not see, and heard words which they did not hear, though the voice of Him that spake filled them with strange fears ; and then we come to that Divine message from the Lord of glory to the soul of His servant, and we find it simply this, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The words came with a startling abruptness ; were themselves plain and familiar. The young Jew of Tarsus might

have read them in Greek books, or heard the proverb quoted a hundred times among his Hebrew friends. They belonged to the wide-spread treasure of similitudes and proverbs drawn from the simplest forms of man's life and work ; and, as such, were not confined to any race or country. Those words St. Paul had probably had often in his thoughts, or on his lips. Never before, we may be sure, had they come to him as they came now ; never before had he applied them to himself, and seen what they had to tell him of God's dealings with him. We may be sure that they were the very words he needed ; that none which we should have thought loftier and more solemn could have done their work so effectually.

If you ask, in what way had St. Paul been kicking against the pricks — what were the goads that had already been striking home ? the answer must be, first, indeed, that the whole work of God upon his soul, as upon the souls of all men, lies behind the veil, and that we know it only in part ; but also, that in what is recorded, there is much that must have had this effect on him. If we believe (as well nigh all students of the Acts are led to believe) that Saul of Tarsus and Joses of Cyprus had been of old, in their earlier youth, companions and friends, that all that belongs to fellowship of heart and intellect had been their inheritance, must we not believe that his first separation from that friend must have been as bitter as was afterwards his second ; that he must have witnessed with a sorrow, which turned to anger, the alienation of that noble and loving nature, of those surpassing gifts to speak to men's hearts and spirits, from the cause of Pharisaism, their accession to that of the Nazarenes ? That change, the conversion of the Son of Consolation, was enough to make him question the soundness of his own convictions ; enough to make him ask whether the society which could win over such a man must not be rooted and grounded in the truth. Can we read the speech of the master and teacher of the young zealot, without feeling that that also brought a warning against the spirit of hostility and bitterness to which he was committing himself ? The caution and timidity of Gamaliel were indeed alien to the nature of Saul of Tarsus ; the temporizing neutrality of his speech could find no echo in the heart which for good or evil was always *thorough* in all it undertook, “ moving altogether if it moved at all.” But those closing words, “ If it be of God ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God,” while they were spoken to the assembled Scribes, were meant probably for that young disciple whose fiery eagerness the prudent Rabbi was seeking, though ineffectually, to restrain. At the time they did but excite him to greater vehemence ; but if his nature was not different from that of other men, that solemn warning must have afterwards sounded in his ears in the lulls of passion, and the revelation of “ I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest,” may have been the answer to the doubts and fears that, after all, it might be possible that he was fighting not for God, but against Him.

One other scene comes before us in the history of the Acts, which we may think of as included in the list. I know not from whom St. Luke was so likely to have learnt all that he has to tell us as to the work, the defence, the death of the martyr Stephen, as from the “ young man who kept the garments of them that stoned him,” foremost among his enemies and accusers. If this were so, then the words in which the story is told will serve to show how deep an impression the facts of it left behind them. At any rate there he was ; and we can without difficulty picture to ourselves what it must have been for one in whom zeal and pity were struggling for the mastery, in whose nature there was all the capacity for sympathy which was afterwards perfected by God's grace, to look upon that face which seemed to all who saw it “ as it had been the face of an Angel ” ; to watch the upturned gaze as of one who saw the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right

hand of God ; to listen to the last intercession, which showed that love was stronger than death, and had been made perfect by suffering. To imagine that all these things had no disturbing effect on him, is to suppose the nature of St. Paul dull and callous to a degree beyond all experience. To believe that they haunted him, vexed him, were with him by night and day, and that he strove with the ruthless energy of an iron will to trample on them and defy them, is in harmony with all that we know of his character, with much that is on record of that of other persecutors. And see, brethren, with what wonderful precision the revelation is addressed to the feelings of a man in that condition. He had tried to persuade himself that the words which spoke of the invisible world as actually manifested to the martyr's spirit, were the utterances of a madman and a dreamer. Now to him also " the Heavens were opened," and he too sees the form of the Son of Man exalted in the glory of His Father. He had listened to that long history of a people always annulling by their own willfulness the calling and election of God ; always resisting the grace of God's Holy Spirit. Now he is taught that he too is " a chosen vessel," an instrument of God's choice for the noblest and highest work which it could be given to man to do. Hitherto he had been setting his will against that election, kicking against all the pricks that were signs and tokens of it. To persevere in that course was to plunge deeper and deeper into a misery that would know no end. To yield himself with a free and hearty assent unto the will of his Lord, even though it was only to learn how great things he must suffer for His name's sake, was to close with the offer of salvation, to enter into the Kingdom of God. In that moment all the veils of passion, prejudice, tradition, which had hitherto concealed the truth from him, were drawn aside, and Christ was revealed not only to him but " in him." He learnt to recognise the dependence of his own life on that of Christ, to see in Him the source of all goodness and righteousness and truth that he was conscious of in himself.

The whole narrative, and above all those memorable words in which the Son of Man is revealed, assert the truth of an election. There was a fore-ordained choice and purpose for the Apostle, which rested upon the groundwork of the sovereign will, *i.e.*, upon the sovereign love of God, the Eternal and Unchangeable. St. Paul saw, and we may see in his experience, the pattern instance of a great law. He was chosen to bear the Gospel of Christ unto the nations. Special gifts were bestowed on him for that high office. All the events of his past life converged to it, and formed a preparation for it. So it was with others. The Twelve stood in the same relation to their Lord. They had " not chosen Him, but He had chosen them." All the members of the great body of which Christ was the head, were chosen in like manner, each to his special work, each supplied with special gifts and powers. All who believed and were baptized were, he was certain, " chosen " to that which their faith and their baptism represented. They were " elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus." They were " chosen before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame."

And the same truth, brethren, holds good of us. As there are diversities of gifts, administrations, energies in the natural world, one man given this work to do and another that, one man mighty and eloquent and honoured, another thoughtful and wise, another patient and laborious, but all resting on what, in that region of man's life, we habitually speak of as the providence of God ; so in the Church of God, which is His Kingdom, there are like differences, resting on the same unity. There may be those among us to whom some special work is assigned, to which they too have been elected, predestined before the foundation of the world. The work of the evangelist, or pastor, or teacher, may be given to us. Our gifts may

point to some work in Church or State, whether it be to guide the thoughts of men, or meet the moral evils of our age, or strive with its doubts or unbelief, or "serve tables" in some work of secular activity, which yet may be done to the Lord and not unto men. If so, in due time the work will appear. The calling and election will manifest itself. Well will it be for us if they recognise it and yield to it. All the blessedness or misery of this life and of the life to come hangs upon our accepting or rejecting it. But if there is no such special vocation; if there are no gifts indicating that we are in that sense "vessels of election"; if we do not see our way clearly, and do not recognise our work in life, we are at least not left in doubt as to that other election which belongs to us and to all the children of God. "This is the will of God, even our sanctification." That is what the "good pleasure" of God, the sovereignty of the everlasting mercies, has marked out even for the least and lowliest of the heirs of His Kingdom. All are sharers in that predestination which points to our being conformed to the image of His Son. Whatever perplexities or hard questions men may set up as stumbling blocks in their own path, or in that of their brethren, this "foundation of God standeth sure" as the eternal hills. If we are tempted by doubts, bewilderments, despair, let us rest on the assurance that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." If temptations of a different and lower kind assail us, let us stand fast in our faith, knowing that in resisting them we are confirming God's election, and are sure of His help.

As in other things, so also in the manner in which he was led to recognise his calling, the history of St. Paul is set forth as a pattern history. In all such cases, in those specially where the call is to Christ's great work, entire devotion to some noble cause, there are preludes and intimations of the final crisis, promptings from within and from without pointing in the same direction, breaking in upon the calm tenor of a man's life, troubling him with vexing thoughts, until he has read them rightly and seen into their meaning. If he resists these, perseveres in a path which he has chosen for himself, he is as one "kicking against the pricks," and he brings on himself proportionate loss and misery. Then comes the moment when the summons to the work, the call to the sacrifice, is clear and unmistakable, and that is the great turning-point of his life. In yielding cheerfully and gladly, even if he is shown "how great things he must suffer" for the name of Christ, there is freedom, and blessedness, and peace. In resisting, though all may prosper outwardly, and the world smile on him, there is the forfeiture of all that God designed for him; there may be the sentence of utter exclusion from the fellowship of God's Kingdom.

And does not the law hold good, brethren, of that other election, which points not to special office and administration in the Church, but to sanctification of the heart and will? Have there not been in the experience of each of us, even when we were wandering furthest from the home of our Father, and following our own wills with the most reckless eagerness, intimations which we might have listened to that we were meant for better things? that the deeds of the flesh, which we were doing, were not the good works which God had prepared for us to walk in? Have we no remembrance of warnings from the wise, and protests from the good, of early friends turning into the strait and narrow path, while we continued in the broad way that leadeth to destruction? Are there no faces thronging the memories of the past, which were to us even then, and yet more as we recall them after the long lapse of years, as those of Angels, looking on us with the long-suffering and love which made them so like their Master? Are there no echoes even yet sounding in our ears of the voice which rose up to the Throne of God, as we went on from bad to worse, heaping up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, with the one prevailing prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"? It may be

that these tokens of God's will for us have been followed by another and a fuller revelation. A time has come to us in which there passed before our minds the view of all that we might yet become—the pattern of the perfect man created after God in righteousness and true holiness, which might even yet be realized in us. If that experience, brethren, has come, or shall come hereafter to any of you, be sure that then the Son of God is revealing Himself in you, showing you what He is, in order that you may be like Him. If you hear of that experience from others in what they call the history of their conversion, do not treat it with doubt or indifference or scorn, lest haply ye too be found, though you know it not, even to fight against God. If you do *not* hear of it, and yet see, what you cannot refuse to recognise, the fruits of the Spirit, you may yet be sure that the change has come. It may do its work suddenly, in an instant; it may, especially where there has been no long resistance, be accomplished gradually, and in its several stages, all but imperceptibly. Do not deprive the Divine work of its reality and power by reducing it to a formula; do not measure its infinite diversity by the standard of a technical definition; but, above all, O friend and brother, remember when that Divine work comes, in any of its forms, within the range of thine own experience, that for thee too, for thee in thy youth, for thee in thy maturity, for thee in thy advancing age, it is “hard to kick against the pricks.” Resistance is possible, but its result is terrible. No revelation of might or majesty, or even of love, is sufficient to prevent it. St. Paul himself, the very vessel of election, might have been “disobedient to the heavenly vision,” might, after all, when he had preached to others, have been himself “a castaway.” The Apostles took their places among God's elect, chosen before the foundation of the world “to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” yet one of them became “the son of perdition,” and “went unto his own place.” It remains for us to make our calling and election sure, to yield our rebellious wills to that love wherewith the Father hath loved us before the foundation of the world.

What is Conversion?

BY RIGHT REV. ALFRED BARRY, D.D.

“*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*”—*Acts ix. 6.*

I. What is the secret of conversion? It is always in essence what, for the instruction and encouragement of all ages, is recorded of the great conversion of St. Paul. It is, first, the manifestation of God's infinite love, stooping from Heaven to draw us to Himself, through Jesus Christ. It is, next, the penitent sense that we have been careless of that love, wandering from, or striving against, the drawing of Divine mercy. Then rises the cry of the soul, “trembling and astonished,” “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” Lastly comes the solemn answer, “It shall be told thee what thou must do.”

These forms of consciousness, in different degrees of vividness and proportion, are always essentially the same. They may be brought home to us through many voices. To Justin the philosopher, who had long sought for truth in vain, sounding all the depths and shoals of human knowledge, the call came in the simple authoritative revelation of the voice of the unknown Teacher, which was to him as the voice of an Angel. To Augustine, in all the rich and turbulent fulness of his youthful energies, first by study of one of the great works of heathen wisdom, and next by the voice, as from Heaven, startling him out of the bewilderment of vain searchings after an unknown God, with the command—“Take the Book and

read." To John Wesley (so he declares), by a word spoken, by a revelation felt within, at a day and hour which he knew as well as he knew his own name, in a Moravian chapel in London. To John Henry Newman, by the early influence of old Evangelic piety, in a crisis of the reality of which (to use his own words) he is as sure as that he has hands and feet. God speaks in many voices, in all the voices of nature and humanity which are His. But the elements of the call are ever the same—God's love in Christ, our own blindness and sinfulness, the cry out of darkness for light, and the answer which "tells us what we shall do."

The acceptance of this call is Conversion. Now, so far as it implies change in the whole current of thought and act, let me press this upon you earnestly, that conversion has no place in the true ideal of Christian life. The one perfect life of a Son of Man upon earth was the life which grew in wisdom and in grace, in love of God and man, as the body grows in stature, by a gradual and unresting growth, with no possibility of cessation or retrogression, with no possibility of change or of conversion. Nor is this to be regarded as a life standing absolutely alone and unapproachable. No! it is our ideal, to which the institution of Infant Baptism in the Church of Christ bears continual witness. Who can be insensible to the beauty and the truth of that Service, in which the sweet unconscious innocence of childhood is taken into the arms of Christ, that the whole of the unfolding life—not this or that part, but the whole—shall be hallowed by the Fatherhood of God, and that His grace shall be developed in the soul from the very beginning, as reason and conscience and love grow—we know not how—out of what is at first but a rudimentary life of sensation and instinct.

In such a life as this there are, no doubt, mostly epochs of what Holy Scripture calls refreshment and revival—swift rushes in the great stream of life, with comparatively still water behind them and before—times when what we have always seen grows out suddenly before our eyes into a new glory—times when some great change of circumstance in joy or sorrow, or some call of God's Providence unexpected, perhaps undesired, comes home to us like a new revelation of life and of God.

For this clearly accords with the whole law of our nature and life. It is true in the intellectual sphere. There are books, which to read makes an epoch in our life; there are teachers, with whom to have living contact is a new intellectual revelation; there are moments, like the hour of the Eureka of the old philosopher, when the veil is suddenly lifted, and the face of truth gleams upon us with a light never to be forgotten. It is so in the moral life. Who cannot remember hours, when, as it seemed for the first time, the greatness of life's responsibility dawned upon him? when the voice of duty sounded in trumpet-tones, and a vow of new obedience was registered in earth and Heaven? Who is so dull in soul as to know nothing of the sudden awaking there of the magic power of love, in its vivid personal intensity, or in the fulness of a wide and deep enthusiasm, by which there comes on life a new light and glow, and weariness and pettiness and selfishness flee away? As in these lower spheres of experience, so in the higher spiritual communion with God. It is always with us; in it "we live and move and have our being." Yet there are times when it comes upon us with a newness of awful and glorious reality. It is as though we had before "heard of it by the hearing to the ear," but now "see it" with our eyes.

This experience seems to belong to the finiteness of humanity. Perhaps, with deep reverence, we may venture to trace such epochs even in the life of the Son of Man Himself: when the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism, and the voice from Heaven called Him to the ministry of life; when at the Transfiguration the glory of Heaven enfolded His humanity, and the voice spake to Him again,

at the moment of His turning to "the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem"; when once more in the Holy Week, at the foretaste of His agony, the same voice spake in answer to His prayer with the revelation of glory, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again"; when in the last agony itself He took upon Him in spirit the whole burden of the Cross, and by the wondering ministration of an Angel was strengthened with a new strength. Certainly we may trace such periods of growth in the spiritual education of the Twelve; when successive confessions of faith told of new stages of development, both in the knowledge of God in Christ, and in the dedication, through all imperfection and blindness, of spirit and soul and body to Him. Side by side with the glorious conversion of St. Paul may we not place, as at least equally glorious, the unceasing spiritual growth of the Apostle whom Jesus loved, and who, resting on His bosom, learnt thus to know continually more and more of the love of God and man?

But conversion, as a change and reversal of previous life, belongs, I repeat, not to the true growth of humanity; it is so far the fruit of sin. In proportion to the greatness of the obstacle is the foaming vehemence of the rapid which has to surmount it. In proportion to the blackness of clouds on the spiritual horizon is the vividness of the lightning-flash, which opens through them a glimpse into Heaven. Therefore it is that in such conversion there is—what there is not in the awakenings of natural growth—a keen pang of shame and fear and bewilderment; such spiritual agony as struck Saul to the ground in awe, and made his first cry to his Master the bewildered cry of one "trembling and astonished." As in all human nature, the very presence of agony is a sign of something which is, in the truest sense, unnatural; for it comes from the casting out of that which, if not then cast out, would be fatal.

II. But of this conversion again men ask, Is it always sudden? does it always come once and once only, so that we can chronicle its very day and hour? As to suddenness, is not the very word a word of our ignorance, which sees but in part? To God's eye nothing can be sudden. We call the eruption of the volcano sudden; but it is only the outcome of forces long and silently gathered in the bowels of the earth. We call the rise of the tornado or the flash of the lightning sudden; but they are simply the completion of the changes of temperature and electricity, which have been preparing for hours or days or weeks. We are startled at what is called the sudden outburst of the fury of revolution, the frenzy of anarchy and crime; but even the thoughtful historian can look below the surface, and tell us of accumulating distress, of oppression gradually becoming intolerable, of the spread through society of wild dreams of impossible aspiration, by which the train is slowly laid, only waiting for the chance spark of explosion. So is it in the soul. We speak of sudden flashes of revival or conversion; but He Who sees the heart can trace there thoughts gradually awakening, moral impulses or emotions often repeated, often resisted, tones of the voice of God half heard in the soul, even through the deafness of carelessness or the din of passion and sorrow; which at last gather, so to speak, in one final concentration of energy, bursting out irresistibly, and carrying with them the whole mind and soul and spirit of the man. Those who have sought to write the life of Saul of Tarsus have almost always speculated most naturally, and it may be most truly, on the long smouldering of such preparation of soil under the hard stiff surface of Pharisaic pride. They have dwelt on the haunting consciousness of the words of truth to which he had seemed deaf; of the "face as it were the face of an Angel," which he had seen bright before the hostile Sanhedrin, brighter still with a radiance from beyond the veil in the hour of willing martyrdom; of the witness heard again and again, often from dying lips, in which the Jesus Whom he persecuted had begun to dawn upon him in

His unearthly Majesty, even before the final vision on the road to Damascus. Yes ! " sudden " is but a term of our imperfect knowledge. It expresses no real law of God's providence. It is an infinite presumption to exalt it into such a law, and say, " So God works, and in no other way."

Nay, even to our eyes there is no such invariable rule. Sometimes conversion is plain, sudden, and unmistakable. Sometimes not sudden, but quiet and gradual. The face of God in Christ may be revealed to us in a moment ; or it may shine upon us like the dawn, gradually brightening into the perfect day.

So also as to its coming once and once only in life. Probably experience never absolutely repeats itself, and what has come to us at some crisis of our life will never come again. But here also there can be no fixed absolute rule, either for time of awakening or time of conversion. Perhaps more often the change is, as I have said, one of accumulation, gradually rising to some climax, and from this still continuing, less vivid, perhaps, but deeper and deeper still. Could we enter into the spiritual history of the three days of blindness at Damascus, and of the long thoughtful sojourn in Arabia, can we suppose that on the awakened soul of the future Apostle there came not in from time to time floods of new light, in some sense not less bright, possibly even fuller of revelation, than that which had shone upon him in the first hour of awakening ? Nay, there are souls, not least saintly, not least enlightened, who, as they look back, can hardly trace even such climax as I have described ; but feel as if all their life had been a time of God's drawing and of their own turning to God, and look still for the climax, if He will, in the hour of death, or in the hour of awaking on the other side of the grave.

III. But, however it comes, what does conversion bring with it ? how far is it a finished work ? how far the mere germ of future hope ? On this point, my brethren, it is but too evident that there is a strange and deadly confusion of idea.

In one sense it has completeness in what Holy Scripture calls the justification of the soul. In it there is the free, absolute forgiveness of the sins of the past, by the love of God through the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As He spake on earth, so He speaks from Heaven, " Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Nor can I doubt that, in various degrees of clearness, as there is the reality, so there is mostly the assurance of such salvation. Men do not only hope and believe : they know, through the insight of true penitence and faith, that the love of God, always shining in itself, has now shone upon them, because the barrier of wilful sin and unbelief has been broken down by the Saviour Himself. So far the old allegory is true, that the burden of guilt falls off at the foot of the Cross. So far every preacher of Christ, even if, standing in such a place as this, he speaks to those of whose spiritual state he can know nothing, dares to speak unhesitatingly, " Let your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow " ; " There is no condemnation if you do but turn to the Lord Jesus." Now is the accepted time, my brother, for you ; now is your day of salvation. The night is not yet come when the words may sound, " Too late ; too late ; ye cannot enter now ! "

But, O, the infinite and mournful falsehood of idea, which would confuse this with perfection of sanctification, and would dare to say that the hour of conversion brings with it the attainment of virtual sinlessness, the utter abolition of the past, the absolute security for the future !

My brethren, it is simply, grossly impossible. Remember that the gift of God's grace and light, supernatural though it be, never destroys the true nature of man ; and if, in respect of that nature, there is anything certain, it is this—that the past, in its effects on the spiritual condition of the soul, is never wholly past ; and that no moment, be it ever so supreme and transcendent in its power, can wholly

determine the future. Conversion, men say, is as a new birth. Yet birth into the world changes, indeed, in a moment, the whole conditions of existence, from darkness to light, from dependent to independent being ; but does it do more than give the first faint germ of life, to grow or to die, according to the history of the hereafter ? Conversion, say others, more scripturally, is a resurrection. But resurrection from the grave destroys not the personal identity which links men to the past ; nor is it, simply as resurrection, a security against death in the future.

No ! the past is not wholly past. Else were it wisdom, instead of folly, to be baptised as of old on a death-bed, and to reserve conversion for the last hour. So St. Paul knew well. How different from the almost complacent recital by the converted of the sins out of which God has called them, were those humble utterances, glimpses of the inner consciousness which poured itself out fully only to God, in which, even to the end, he feels and mourns over his early enmity against Christ. " I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of Christ. I was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious. I obtained mercy only because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." It is notable that whenever for any reason he has to dwell on the grace, the mercy, the mission given to him, then it is that these thoughts come back to him with irresistible force. He cannot think with calmness of the years which might have been given to Christ, and transfigured by the grace of God, and which had been wasted, and worse than wasted. He knew, what every thoughtful Christian knows, that the sins of the past, though forgiven, nay, because they are forgiven, must be punished ; and that they find us out most of all in this—that they still weaken the spiritual energy of devotion to God, still remain in the effects marked upon the soul, come back to us in our holiest hours on earth, perhaps in the last hour of death trouble the clearness of faith and the sweetness of peace. Be not deceived, brethren : God is love, but love and righteousness must harmonise together. Turn to Him, if it must be, even at the last ; but, if it may be, let the soul be given to Him from the very first, in the simplicity of childhood, in the fervour of youth : not battered by the world, not stained through and through by the sins of the flesh : but, whatever its frailty, at least before it has a past, on which it ought to look back in terror and shame, which it makes the blood run cold to hear how men teach themselves and others to forget, and almost to glory in, as if it were wholly passed away.

Yet more fatal still the delusion which claims for the hour of conversion the security of the future. Strangely, yet not unnaturally, in many forms does this impatience of spiritual uncertainty, this anxiety to anticipate on earth the close of the probation which belongs to Heaven, emerge in the history of Christianity. And men, as usual, have fastened on this or that text of the Bible, wrenched from its context, and isolated from the general tenour of teaching, to support the conclusion in which " the wish is father to the thought." " Can a man fall from grace ? " asked a great man on his death-bed ; and, when those who professed to speak the word of Christ said, " No ; " " Then," sighed he with a sigh of false relief, " then am I safe : for that I was once in grace I know." But of all startling and fatal forms of this delusion, what can be more mournful than to hear men but recently converted from gross and sensual sin, or from a lifelong ignorance of God, just because they rightly feel the assurance of His forgiveness, declare that for them the strife is over, the victory won, refuse to pray for themselves as still sinners before God, and hold it treason against the fulness of His mercy even to ask whether they can ever fall away ? Thank God ! it is true, and it has been shown again and again, that the hour of conversion should be the beginning of a new life, yielding its visible and certain fruits of devotion, of righteousness, and

even of holiness. It is true that sometimes the work of but one hour seems as great in some, as in others the work which bears the burden and the heat of day. It is true that in deep repentance the very knowledge and conquest of the sins of the past may make a man cling closer to the mercy of God for himself, and be able, as again St. Paul was able, better to set forth the greatness of God's love to others. But this notion that the beginning is the ending, and that the germ of perfection is the full-grown fruit—as it is, and must be, a sorrow or an offence to those who know human nature, and believe in the righteous and eternal laws of God, so is it no part of the Christianity of the New Testament, and it is especially contradicted in the experiences of St. Paul.

He knew himself, if ever man did, a sinner saved. He felt, if ever man felt, the certainty of God's forgiveness. He spoke in wondering thankfulness of the special mercy granted to him as to one born out of due time. But when he wrote, years after, to the Corinthians—to a Church before which he felt it necessary to uphold his own apostolic dignity—words yet came from him, wrung from his inner consciousness, which told of his own struggle, “lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” When in the prison at Rome he felt that his work on earth was already showing signs of drawing to a close, he yet declared earnestly, and (it would seem) in protest against this very anticipation of Christian perfection, “Not that I had already attained, either were already perfect: I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Jesus Christ”; “if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” When after this he wrote to his son Timothy of the greatness of salvation to sinners, he could not help adding, “of whom I am”—not, observe, “I was,” but, “I am”—“of whom I am chief.” Not till the call to rest was almost sounding in his ears did he dare to say, what some say rashly before they have really entered in the Christian life, “I have fought the good fight: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.”

IV. I have heard it said, in words ominously like the old *Populus vult decipi et decipiatur*, that this delusion has often told for good, and been effective, where nothing else could reach. But even if I could believe in the permanent effectiveness of delusion, yet still—if only in these days men would understand it in many things—the question is not whether it is effective, but whether it is true; and, if not true, what sin can be so great as false witness borne for Christ, and in the name of the God of truth?

We dare not so preach the Gospel. No, brethren; if I speak to any who know that they have not yet turned to God, then on them I would urge the blessing of conversion, as offered them, pressed upon them, by the infinite love of God, and as carrying with it both the certainty of present forgiveness, and the spring of a real newness of life. If I speak to those who in different degrees have been drawn to Him, whether by gradual growth, or by times of awakening, or by the agony of conversion, to them I would repeat the true Gospel of encouragement: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit”; and add, “Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.” But still to all we must declare the message at once of humility and patience, and of the need and promise of continual progress. True, we must have a consummation, for which the ineradicable instinct of perfection cries out, and in which alone we can find the needful rest of our soul. But it is in Heaven—sure, because Christ Himself prepares our place there, and because He has, so to speak, fastened to the souls of all the bright cords of light and love, along which, as by a spiritual gravitation, they are being drawn continually to Him. In this, in this alone, we have what we need. We can unite the grasp of the perfect ideal

with the sense of actual imperfection ; we have at once the secret of rest and the secret of progress ; we feel the finite weakness of our own humanity, and the infinite grace and love of God. It is enough. We can stay ourselves on this, with the myriads of saints in the centuries that are gone, till faith is lost in vision, and we know even as we are known.

Conversion of St. Paul

BY REV. W. H. BROOKFIELD, M.A.

" Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? "—Acts ix. 6.

The narrative of the conversion of St. Paul is not only, like every other Scripture narrative, very concise, but even somewhat abrupt, as if there were nothing naturally leading up to it. It will appear, however, considerably less sudden and unaccountable if we bear in mind that he had been present as an accessory at the martyrdom of St. Stephen. He had witnessed the composure, the confidence of the murdered Saint ; his triumph over agony and death. On the threshold of immortality he had heard him exclaim, " I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the Right Hand of God." He had heard his prayer of Faith and Hope, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit " ; and that of Charity, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It seems impossible to doubt that this must have awakened in the generous mind of Paul a great deal of misgiving in favour of the religion he was persecuting. It is not in the least unnatural that he should reproach himself with disloyalty to the old religion, in permitting these new sentiments to cross his mind ; and that he should try to stifle and to stamp them out, by increased severities against the Christians. And even upon his way to Damascus to exterminate—as far as in him lay—the new heresy, I believe that convictions were forcing themselves upon him, that it was no heresy but truth ; and that a conflict was convulsing every fibre of his mind, of which the crisis was very near at hand.

It was the crisis of conscience. His own mind and the Lord Jesus were speaking for the first time in harmony. It was the conflux of two mighty streams rushing together to become one ; and thenceforward to roll on in majestic union for ever. " Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ? " and " Lord, Lord, why persecute I Thee ? " I have no doubt that these two exclamations simultaneously chimed in perfect concord, from two spirits that never fell into discord any more. The conflict in the mind of Paul was ended. I mean the conflict as to the side on which he should enlist himself ; for as to distress of mind, there still awaited him a fearful struggle. The battle between prepossession and conviction was done. The crisis was past. The crucified Jesus assumed His Throne upon the heart of the convert, who bows himself in submission—and asks, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? "

At this point the conversion appears to be complete. What follows is not so much a part of the conversion as the sequel of it, and the carrying of it into practice. He acknowledges Jesus—Whose saints he had been persecuting—as the Lord of his future life. He asks the most comprehensive question which the most exalted sense of duty to that Lord could put : " What wilt Thou have me to do ? " And how he afterwards performed that duty, let all Christendom proclaim.

Conversion in its most frequent and legitimate sense means conversion from one religion to another ; as St. Paul's was a conversion, with a sharpness and decisiveness of transition hardly realised in any other convert, from Judaism to Chris-

tianity. In this sense, of course, we are not susceptible of conversion, being professedly already Christians. Nor would it be becoming to assume that in a congregation met together here to worship God in the name of Christ, there can be many, if indeed, any, present so utterly depraved that nothing less than a change as radical, complete, and absolute as being born again could suffice to rank them in the lists of Christ. But there *are* such people. There are people in the world so totally devoid of any element of Christian life, that without a regeneration as complete as that which converted the leprous frame of Naaman into flesh like that of a little child, they can have no part or lot with Christ. Again, in the other extreme, there are those—a great many more perhaps than some of the harsher censors of human nature would allow—who are by God's assisting grace living in the Spirit of Christ, and in the main behaving themselves according to His rule; whose labour is cheered by a consciousness of His approval; whose relaxations and amusements, and I do not scruple to add, whose merriment and laughter in due time and place, do no violence to His humane prescription: and whose repose is hallowed by His heavenly protection. Yet even these have imperfections, few or many, and infirmities from each of which a progressive process of conversion is necessary; with reference to which they may extract some profitable suggestions from the more signal and stupendous transaction near Damascus. But between these two extremes which I have indicated, of the good and bad, there is the great multitude of average men and average women; persons with so much good in them, that we cannot wish them converted into something entirely different from what they are; and yet with so much infirmity that we cannot rest content that they should continue entirely unchanged from what they are. Of each and all of these—both those who rank with the extremes of good and bad (God alone can class them) and those who occupy the interval—it may be said that they all require conversion, in kind and in proportion, exactly according to the particulars and the degree in which they diverge from the line of Christian rectitude. It is in this limited sense of the word converted that our Saviour Himself employs it (Matt. xviii. 3); meaning, “unless ye be converted from this particular infirmity—emulation, which you have just been exhibiting.” Now it is true that there is very little external resemblance between the conversion of St. Paul to Christianity and those conversions from individual defects of conduct, few or many, upon which Christianity insists. But there is this feature common to them all—all, however trivial or of whatever magnitude, viz., that every such invitation to conversion brings with it a command to do something which we are reluctant to do, or to leave undone something which we have a mind to do, and about which, therefore, self and duty are brought into instantaneous collision. It is difficult to conceive how much St. Paul would have to give up in being obedient to the heavenly vision, when it bade him go on to Damascus. Pride and self under the plausible and specious pretext of religious zeal would urge, “Proceed to Damascus—accomplish the will of the ecclesiastical officials, stamp out the Nazarene heresy, win praise and power, and influence and renown as the champion of the temple, and of the dominant religion.” “Yes”—said the better spirit—“go to Damascus, since the heavenly vision bids thee go, but go to incur contempt and execration, degradation and derision, and it may be death. But go as the obedient soldier of the Cross.” Self succumbed, Christ and the truth triumphed. And such is the formula to which every conflict between self and duty may be reduced, whether it be the most trivial question in domestic life, or a transaction that may influence the whole future of humanity; in either case it is Christ bidding you go one way, Self another. I will detain you further only to suggest the adoption in every such predicament, of St. Paul's formula of enquiry.

It is sometimes instructive to press fresh significance from a text by varying the emphasis of it—"Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do? Thou, Lord, art my Creator, my Preserver, my Redeemer, and wilt be my Judge; what wilt Thou have me to do?" Not, what will man have me to do; not, what will friends pity me for doing, what will enemies deride me for doing, what will society denounce me for doing. Not, what does self shrink from doing; but, what wilt *Thou* have me to do? What does Thy revealed word say: what do the teaching and example of Thy Son say; what does Thy Spirit on my conscience say? Then again, what wilt Thou have *me* to do? Not, what have others done; not, what might they do under like circumstances; not, what would the common practice of mankind countenance me in doing; but, what wilt Thou have *me* to do—me in whom conscience and Thy Spirit are sufficiently alive for me to be asking the question. Once more, what wilt Thou have me to do? Not, what wilt Thou have me to think. Still less, what wilt Thou have me to *think that I think*. Not, what badge of religious party to adopt; not, on what school of sentiment to affiliate myself; not, what controverted topics to dispute about; but, what to do. Let us never forget this truth, the seed of many truths, that the end and object of thought is action; and as for words, and controversies, and opinions and beliefs, and sentiments, which do not end, and were never meant to end, in moral action, there are no articulate words, nor inarticulate sounds trivial enough to express the worthlessness of the like. And as to controversial janglings—with which the land is ringing as a cathedral city of many churches rings with peals of bells, not one peal in accordance with another; the man who has ever had pity on another, has forgiven a trespass, has rejoiced with them that rejoice and wept with them that weep; the man who in a spirit of Christian love has bestowed a timely cup of cold water on a fellow-creature, that man has done more for the Kingdom of Heaven than he that has blackened tons of paper with floods of controversial ink—ink in which it is curious to remember that the chief ingredient is gall.

But to return to the question "What wilt Thou have me to do?" Ask the question within these walls, and the answer is, to cultivate spirituality of character, by uniting with a multitude of fellow-Christians in acts of prayer and praise, and the reception of the Word of God—which each of them, in their measure and degree, contribute to that spiritual cultivation. Before many minutes have elapsed it will assume a social and domestic shape. To-morrow it will adapt itself to the exigencies of the market, the farm, the desk, the counter, the camp, the deck, the tribunals of the law, the councils of the legislature. There is no predicament so homely and so trivial, none on the other hand, so stupendous and august, but the spirit of duty, and the claims of duty, and the voice of duty reach it, and it becomes an occasion of obedience, or of disobedience. All duty is in the service of the Infinite; and as in Eternity there can be no quick and slow, no late and early—so it seems to me that there can be no great and little in Infinity, and that to the infinite Taskmaster, the Almighty distributor and observer of duty, there can be no appreciable interval between the Seraphim standing in burning row behind His Throne, and the glowworm lighting its tiny lantern in the hedge. And so before the infinite Judge of duty, there is no difference in magnitude and merit between a horny-handed labourer, plodding by the early sun to fertilise a few square yards of ground, and a Paul rising up amidst a blaze of effulgence, to go to Damascus and afterward to evangelise a continent, if both be in the path of duty, if both have asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" if both be doing it in honesty and humility, and in love to God and man. How many, many lessons crowd upon a theme like this! But let this one suffice—and it might well deserve

to be enforced by accents not such as these, but by the lips of Isaiah, Ezekiel, of St. Paul himself—namely, that in all the vicissitudes of life, its joys, its sorrows, its engagements and its obligations—in all its varieties of place, of circumstances and of station; at all ages and in both sexes, in wealth and poverty, power and obscurity; in praise and blame—in health and sickness, in abasement and abounding—we should enquire in an honest and good heart, with a fixed resolve to act upon the answer which conscience may return, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

A Question for All

BY REV. JOHN GROTE, B.D.

“*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*”—Acts ix. 6.

There is little resemblance between the circumstances of any of us here and those of him who asked this question. It is a question, however, which we should do well to ask on each occasion when we look forward to any period of our existence, be it great or small, a day, a year, a lifetime. It is a question which befits and becomes us, for whatever we think about ourselves we really are in the hands of God, entirely and altogether dependent on Him, the creatures at each moment of His support, and favour, and mercy. It is a question which it is *wise* for us to ask, for it takes but little consideration to make us understand that there is no happiness for us in any course except that which God would have us take: and it is a question which we *ought* to ask, because we are all of us bound to God by such strong obligations that, unless we will be guilty of the grossest ingratitude, we cannot but take Him into account and consult Him, and think what we may do to please Him in all our plans and actions.

Whenever then we are looking forward and thinking what we shall do, this question should more or less be present with us. At the outset of life, when the whole course of it is in some respect matter of consideration, what it shall be; at the entering upon any particular pursuit in it; at the opening of each day, which is something to us like a fresh beginning of life, an awakening of us by God from unconsciousness to renewed activity; or as now, at the beginning of a fresh year—on each such occasion the thought should come into our minds, what is it God would have done by us? what is it which supposing Him to do as we know He does, to look at us and attend to us, would fulfil His wish regarding us and give Him pleasure? Practically, I suppose, we many of us think a good deal of what is the best thing we can do, what will be the wisest and most useful course to take: sometimes perhaps we think *too much* about it, and fall into disobedience to our Lord's precepts to have no care for the morrow, but to cast all our anxiety upon Him. If now in all our anxiety there was a little mixed of what should be the chief care of all—anxiety to please God—we can scarcely tell how much it would sweeten all the rest, how the load of life would be lightened and the rough ways of it smoothed before us, what a clue would be given to us through the perplexing intricacies, as they may sometimes be, of right and duty, how much more clearly we should see the way set before us, and how much more we should have of patience and cheerfulness to run our race along it.

The mere having this thought or question in our mind, as I have said, would be a vast blessing and advantage to us, for it would always to a certain extent answer itself, that is, in many particulars the will of God would show itself at once before us. Still occasions will sometimes arise when we may be led to ask with deep anxiety, How are we to know what God's will is for us? and it might

seem to us more simple to ask, straightforwardly, What ought I to do, or What is right, rather than, What shall I do to please God ?

The questions are of course at the bottom the same, only that, as Christian men, the question should present itself to us in the latter shape as well as in the former ; and there are many cases in which the answer will come to us more strongly and clearly when we ask it in this shape. We and all men are God's workmanship, and we and all Christian men are His redeemed children, created and redeemed by Him in order to His glory and the common holiness and happiness of us all. This is what He desires and watches for, and so far as we do so too, we are brought into sympathy or fellow-feeling with Him ; in the words of St. John we and He have fellowship one with the other ; and so it is we come to feel what is our part in the doing His will, and to be anxious and earnest to do it. God has great purposes to carry out, and what He would have us do is to help them, and the first purpose, so far as regards each one of us, is our own individual good character or holiness. I say the *first* purpose with each one of us, because it is the one nearest at hand to each ; but this is no selfish aiming at our own exclusive good ; we must at the same time fall in with all the rest of God's purpose and will ; our own road to Heaven is by doing good to others and trying to get them there. Let us think then of God as watching us and all men each moment, and wishing in regard to us that all we do may help forward His own great purposes of man's holiness and happiness (which is His glory) ; and may *not* be such as to hinder them, and help forward the kingdom of Satan His enemy ; and let us seek to find out in each case what it is that God would have us do.

We will now very shortly try one or two sorts of conduct, and ask ourselves about them in general whether they are what God would have us do, and whether the objects of them are what God would have us act for. Supposing our determination this morning when we got up, so far as we may have thought at all what we should do during the day, was, We will make *ourselves* as happy as we can, We will do the most we can for *our own* enjoyment ; is *this* what God would have us do ?

I suppose none of us would exactly say it was, though if what the Bible calls " saying in the heart " means the feeling upon which people act, it is possible some of us might be inclined to say it *there*. But in a general way, the exclusive attention to our own enjoyment probably arises more from our forgetting to think of the enjoyments of others, than from the deliberate preferring of ourselves to others. There is a passage in the Bible very much to the purpose in regard to this, " Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others " : look, that is, not in the way of interference and meddling, but in the way of sympathy and thoughtfulness. The precept, you see, goes upon the supposition that our own selves and our own things we are sure to think of, whereas it is possible that without reminding, and without some effort, we may not be attentive, as we should be, to the opportunities of helping forward God's wish that others also should be good and happy. Not, of course, that God does not wish us to be happy ourselves : as I have said, the happiness of each one of us is just what God does wish and work for : but then it must be real happiness and lasting happiness. And for happiness to be real, there is one thing which people very often find out for themselves in life ; and that is, that it is no use making happiness or enjoyment too much itself an object. Thinking too much of our own happiness almost always leads to disappointment : the truly happy temper is that which lays hold of happiness, as God gives it, with thankfulness to Him, and which, in respect of the future, looks to other worlds besides this. Again, since we have no knowledge of our own which will show us the way to acquire this real

and lasting happiness, it will not do for us to say that, inasmuch as God desires our happiness, the only thing we need think of is, how to make ourselves as happy as possible and so fulfil His will : rather we must turn it the other way, and say that the only thing we need think of is, how to do what God would have us, and that *thus* only shall we arrive at our best happiness. God wishes that we should be happy as much as we can wish it, and He knows what will make us happy, while we do not. And therefore we may be sure that in doing what He would have us do we are going the way to happiness ; and that the best course for happiness, and one which cannot lead to disappointment, is to find out if we can how to do this.

Is it then the happiness of *others* which God would have us always be thinking of, and is the promoting of this what He would have us do ? It is clear we are much nearer the mark in this than in the other, and in fact, for hitting it, only want two things : one, to be right in our idea what the happiness of others is, the other to remember, about ourselves as well as about others, that there is one thing besides the happiness of His creatures which God desires, and that is, their goodness or holiness. If therefore we remember that we cannot make others really happy unless, by God's grace, they are made in some degree good and holy also ; and if we remember too, as to ourselves, that goodness or holiness is not a thing like happiness, a thing, that is, which we shall often have the most of by thinking the least about it, but that it must be taken care of in ourselves and in our own hearts, and that it is a tender plant which will not grow except it is taken care of and continually refreshed by God's grace procured by prayer : if we remember these two things, then we are perhaps not far out in saying that doing good to others (taking care of our own heart as well) is the main thing which God would have us do. In doing this, we are doing God's work. His own and special work : hear the Apostle, " Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us " : it is in *love* that consists the following and imitation of God. And what God would have us do is that part of His work which we *can* do, and which lies in our own particular way to do according to our circumstances. Is there anything which wants doing for the goodness and happiness of those about us, and which we can do or help in ? Here is something which God would have us do : and He knows, and we shall find, that in doing this we shall at the same time be making ourselves happier. So far from active religion having anything of the nature of gloom or unhappiness it is the one special spring of cheerfulness and enjoyment : and while our toil to treasure up earthly happiness for ourselves so often ends in sourness and disappointment, the accomplishment of the task which God would have done by us is in its nature cheerful and pleasurable, because it occupies our thoughts without the sting of fear or anxiety, for we know that He Who *can* bless *will* bless it, and because it tends to fill our heart with the thought and the reverence of Him Himself, in Whose presence is true life, and around Whom, wherever He abides, are pleasures which cannot disappoint or fail.

We have already to a certain degree found out what God would have us do, in trying whether it was the seeking of our own or others' happiness : it remains only for one moment to say how we are to be more fully instructed in it. Within the pages of the Bible there are two principal ways in which we learn what it is God wishes us to do : these are, God's express commandments, and the example of Christ, God in human flesh, on earth. And both of these two things we shall understand much better from considering them thus, not simply in themselves but as keys to what is the whole and entire will of God for man's life on earth. Of such a life, Christ our Lord in His character as man, has given us an outline, and

God's special commandments have fixed for us one or two of the main features. The rest we must each one of us fill up for ourselves according to the circumstances in which God has placed us, with prayer for the grace of His Holy Spirit, with watchfulness over our own hearts and conduct, with watchfulness also for opportunities of doing good, and asking ourselves in doubtful cases, not, What may I do without displeasing God? but rather, What can I do which will best please Him? And then, by the grace of God's Holy Spirit blessing His Word, it will be told us what we must do: and if we act upon this telling, it is what we shall never repent of, but shall see cause to bless God for it through all eternity.

Lord, What Wilt Thou Have Me to Do?

BY RIGHT REV. GEORGE MOBERLY, D.C.L.

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—Acts ix. 6.

These words, in their plainest and most direct meaning, have no reference to us; we are not called upon, at any precise moment, to alter our whole course of life, to relinquish all that we have ever loved or held before, and put ourselves, as a new thing, into the hands of God, to execute whatever He would have us do. We do not know, and never have known that personal rising up of the soul to self-abandonment, under which a man is bold to throw himself, from an immediate and new conviction of duty, into a divinely appointed course, and in the strength of that personal conversion to be another man for his life.

People converted to be Christians after having been bred heathens are often in this case. They feel themselves altogether different from what they were; new thoughts, new views, I might almost say new senses, seem to be created in them; they look on things as they never looked on them before; they feel a new calling; they are elevated into new beings: from the power of Satan they feel themselves, all, as it were, of a sudden, planted into the Kingdom of God; and noble and elevated is the strong devotion of soul under which they throw themselves into God's hands, ready to do and suffer, ready to be, and be thankful to be, whatever He thinks good to make them.

This is a sort of advantage which those people sometimes have, who have been converted in later life and baptized as adults; but their case has its corresponding dangers. Not to speak of the loss of the youthful graces, the budding infantine sweetness of the regenerate heart, and the deeper quality, and more enduring nature of trained, and habitually educated religion; there are fearful trials which assail the faith of late converts; bound, as they are, to believe in the Divine efficacy of the little sprinkling, and few words of their baptism; bound not to doubt, but earnestly believe, that, thenceforward, God's face is turned on them in love, having before regarded them only in displeasure and offence; bound not to doubt the absolute forgiveness of their former sins, but to regard themselves (even though their evil nature is still on them, and the tendencies of former corruption are continually soliciting them) as new creatures in Christ, washed and made quite pure by the cleansing waters, which mystically wash away sin.

Therefore, let no one imagine that our condition, who were baptized in our infancy, and thus made Christians before we were able to understand either our state of nature, or our state of grace, is less advantageous than theirs, even though that particular excitement of self-devotion, of which we speak, is less intense to us than it sometimes is to those who become Christians in later years. On the

contrary, we have to thank God for having kept us ever in His house from our birth, for having surrounded us with holy lessons, taught us holy prayers, given us holy knowledge, trained us in all sorts of holy training, and put us now into a state and condition in which, if our excitement be less our steadiness should be greater, and if our feeling be not so intense and vivid as that of adult converts, it ought to be more deeply seated, more intimately diffused in all our cast of mind and thought, and more practical.

It ought to be so with us, who were baptized as infants ; and with very many it is so. Very many do live on, even from their very childhood, in constantly growing habits of grace and prayer ; visibly growing—growing so that even our blind and dim eyes can see them grow—growing in wisdom as they grow in stature, and in favour with man, and, as far as man can judge, with God.

Some, I say, grow thus visibly, and pass on from sweet infancy to dutiful boyhood, from dutiful boyhood to self-conquering youth, from self-conquering youth to the quiet strength and high services of devoted manhood. And more, we may trust, grow invisibly ; they are growing even when neither themselves, nor their neighbours, know of their growth ; when they themselves may, day by day, and week by week, be mourning over their short-comings of duty, and frequent offences ; and when their neighbours may see more of their failings than of their secret devotion of heart and will, and so know nothing of their growth ; many such may be growing all the time, growing secretly, growing in the sight of God, Who “is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

The growth of hearts is really a secret thing. Perhaps it may not be too much to say that men *never know of it* ; never, that is, fully, accurately, and exactly. No man can tell where he stands in God's sight ; for no man can estimate his own faith, no man can weigh his sins, no man can gauge his own repentance, no man can value his deeds of devotion ; and this being so, it follows that some, according to the diversities of human character and disposition, are liable to be a great deal too easy about themselves, and others too fearful ; and sometimes it is those who are really the worst who are the happiest and most easy, and the best who are most fearful and tempted to despair. In the disposition of fear, then, and in the temptation to despair, the comfort of that verse of St. John may be very great and due. Provided always, that a man is not neglecting his visible offices of duty and worship ; provided, that those parts of his devotion to God which are outward and certain are carefully and anxiously done. In such circumstances he may make his visible outward life an index to himself of his invisible and inward life. He may hope that the inner growth is not checked and stopped, while he knows himself in his outer devotion to be desirous, and to take pains to please God ; and he may then trust, that though his inner heart and conscience do really and most painfully condemn him, yet the Almighty and most merciful Lord God is much greater, more deeply seeing, and wiser than his heart, and knowing all things, loveth him, and desireth his salvation.

It does not need that I should prove that all people are bound to do God's will ; nor that you, being His baptized soldiers and servants, have a new and more searching obligation and vow upon you to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life ; nor that, being bred in the knowledge and fear of God, and all Christian nurture in this place, you are bound, even above the vast majority of your fellow-Christians, to shine like lights in the world, and adorn the doctrine of Christ your Saviour by all kinds of holy living. All this needs not to be proved, for each one of you familiarly knows it.

But though we all know this, we are far off from doing it ; and, in truth, we are all of us apt to substitute for the rule of God's will, another rule. This other

real rule of our lives is a complex one ; it is made up of what we ourselves like and prefer, what the world about us likes and approves, and what God wills, together. These three elements of the real practical rule under which most men seem to live are mingled in various proportions by different people. Some follow more entirely their own will, and their neighbours' less. Then, again, the will of God is often thought to speak only negatively ; to forbid some things, as murder, theft, falsehood, and the like, but not to give actual practical directions of living ; so that, on this ground too, people often deceive themselves, and come to think that they do God's will sufficiently, if they refrain from the commission of great and glaring sins ; but whichever way it be, the general fact is abundantly clear, that in spite of the great and acknowledged obligation to obey the will of God, we do all, practically, desert that will in many cases, and walk in ways of our own choosing, which He certainly cannot approve as if we walked in His way.

Now to those who really do wish to obey God and walk in His ways, it may be truly said, that in fact they know what is God's will better than they suppose they do. While they do actually follow, as I just now said, a joint rule of life, in which their own will is apt to be the greatest portion, they really do know, more than they are themselves always aware, what the will of God is in each case.

And, therefore, to find God's will, they principally need to wish to find it ; and if they wish earnestly they will not fail.

Here, then, come in St. Paul's words, as words of high practical use. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" If we would say these words to ourselves in the morning when we first wake, in what a different point of view should we regard the prospect of the occupations and duties of the day !

Believe me, you will find it a very practical recommendation ; you will find it one, which will require no small resolution to act upon ; you will find it one, which assumes that you have a real heart of devotion ; you will find it one, which, acted upon with any honesty of purpose, will very shortly take you quite out of the line of ordinary easy living, and show you, alas ! only too forcibly, how widely ordinary easy living falls short of the real standard of conscience, of Scripture, of the baptismal promise, and of the will of God.

But under such a rule your souls will grow ; grow in grace, and the knowledge and love of God. To do so will be a sign of the Spirit, and a means of increase in the Spirit.

He Who made you His own in holy baptism, and Who has done such unspeakably great things for you since, will then undoubtedly be blessing you more and more, and leading you forward in the holy course of increasing likeness to Christ ; and so growing, your hearts may not condemn you, or, if your hearts condemn you, you may yet have that secondary comfort of a timid faith, in the recollection that God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things.

Church-Workers

BY RIGHT REV. HARVEY GOODWIN, D.D.

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?"—Acts ix. 6.

The text contains only eight words ; but in the original Greek there are only five. "Wilt Thou have" make one word. "To do" also make one word. So, that if we divide the text according to the Greek words, we shall have the following five divisions : (1) Lord, (2) what, (3) wilt Thou have, (4) me, (5) to do.

1. "Lord." Observe that this means the Lord Jesus Christ: not God the Father, but God the Son, and that in His human nature. St. Paul, as you may remember, speaks of himself as an Apostle to whom Jesus Christ appeared as to "one born out of due time." It was that very Jesus, Who some two years before had died upon the Cross, and had been buried, and had risen again, and ascended into Heaven, that spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus. He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?" And it was this voice of Jesus Christ Himself that softened Saul's heart and turned him from a persecutor into an Apostle. And I mention this in applying the words of my text to Church-workers, because I am sure that it is the same voice, and that alone, which can by the agency of the Holy Spirit make real hearty Church-workers. Mere good nature, and what we call philanthropy, will not do it. I do not wish to depreciate such motives of conduct. I thank God for all good gifts; for good nature, and kindness, and philanthropy amongst the rest. And I dare say that such motives as these will often lead a man to give an annual subscription of a guinea to some society, or ten pounds to a hospital, and so forth; but they will not lead, as a general rule, to conduct which involves real self-sacrifice. They will not carry a man out as a Missionary, or make him undertake laborious or unpleasant work at home. They will not make a young man or a young woman, who has worked hard through six days of the week, regard it as a privilege and pleasure to spend a good part of the seventh in a Sunday school: at least I think not. My strong belief is, that the only real spring of this kind of conduct is the vision, or the voice, of Jesus Christ Himself. It is when the Lord Jesus reveals Himself to a man as crucified for sin, as having assumed human nature and human weakness for the purpose of bringing men home to God, it is when He says with His still small voice, while He points to His wounds and His Cross and His crown of thorns and His empty grave, "This have I done for thee: what hast thou done for Me?"—it is when this takes place, that a man feels that he is not his own but bought with a price, and that he has no choice but to devote himself and all that he has to the service of Him Who loved him, and Who redeemed him by His most precious blood.

2. "What." You may think that there is not much to be said about a little word like this; yet there is something to be said nevertheless. It is worth noting that the Greek word, which is translated *what*, means *what* when it occurs in a question, and *anything* when it does not so occur. So that we may say that the Christian's question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is answered by merely scratching out the note of interrogation at the end of the sentence. By so doing *what* is changed into *anything*; and really that is the best answer to the question. "What am I to do?" says the Christian; and the proper reply is, "Anything that Christ wishes you to do." I do not say that all of us realize this, or that we all carry out completely in our conduct the principle which I am laying down: there is no doubt a great tendency in all times to do that, which we are told that some did in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ upon earth: "Lord," said one, "I will follow Thee," but "I want to do *this*"; "Lord," said another, "I also will follow Thee," but "I want to do *that*"; and you will find in the heading of the chapter to which I have referred this significant description of those men's conduct, "Divers would follow Him, but *upon conditions*." Now Christ will have, and ought to have, no conditions. Soldiers, when they enlist, can make no conditions: they must do what the commanding officer bids them; and those who have been signed with the sign of Christ's cross, in token that they shall be His soldiers and servants to their lives' end, ought to have no conditions, but ought at any time to be willing to change *what* into *anything*, that is, to be ready to do exactly what is required of them, or what God's providence points out to be their duty.

Let me just add that those, who are willing to do *anything*, are sure to find *something* to do. No Christian man ought to be in the condition of those men in the parable, who said that they were standing idle because no one had hired them. God's vineyard is a very large one, and can employ any amount of labour that can be put upon it: only let a Christian say, "I want some work," and he must live in a very strange and most exceptional parish, if nothing can be found for him to do: there is always weeding to be done, if there be nothing else.

3. But I must go on to my next words, "wilt Thou have." I told you that in the original these were one word; and that word is, I think, a very impressive and striking one, because it implies that the *wishes* of the Lord Jesus Christ are to be the guide of a Christian's conduct. The language is to my mind more striking than if it had been "what do you command me to do?" One could quite have imagined St. Paul saying this. There he lies upon the ground, humbled, broken, oppressed by the feeling of having to contend with some one much stronger than himself; and we can fancy him consenting in very terror to give up the persecuting course, which he has followed hitherto. Just as in old time when one knight had unhorsed another, and had the unhorsed man at his mercy, he would be able to extort any terms that he pleased. But the tone of St. Paul's appeal to the Divine Knight, Who had unhorsed and conquered *him*, was of quite a different kind. In his case it was not a mere triumph of superior strength; his reason and his will were subdued; he saw even now, though he knew at present so little by actual experience of the service which he had just entered, that that service was perfect freedom; *not*—what *must* I do? what shall I be *compelled* to do? what shall I be punished for not doing? but rather this—What is your *wish*? Let me only know by the faintest sign or the slightest word what is my Lord's will, and that *will* shall be done with all the readiness of a glad and willing heart. And this expresses exactly the spirit in which a Church-worker must work. Your work, my Christian brethren, will only then be satisfying to yourselves, when it is the offering of willing hearts desiring to do their Saviour's will. Your language to yourselves should not be, "Must I do this, or must I do that?" But rather, "Does Christ my Lord wish this, or does He wish that?" If only it be His wish, then it shall also be mine, and the thing shall be done."

4. Next comes the word "me": the shortest of my five divisions, but perhaps the most important: the most important, because it brings the whole matter of doing Christ's will home to each of us. There is a common saying, that "what is everybody's business is nobody's business"; and undoubtedly a great deal of good work is left undone, because each person thinks that some one else ought to do it. I suppose that no one would deny, that in every parish there ought to be persons forthcoming for every good work. There are such works as these, teaching in the Sunday schools, visiting the sick, reading to the aged, practising for the parish choir, collecting for various good societies, and so forth. All these things ought to be done, and every one will admit it; and yet in some parishes you find that they are not done; everything seems asleep or dead; and everybody seems to expect that some one else is going to undertake the work. Now the remedy for this evil is for every one to reflect upon the word "me." The question is not, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have my neighbour to do?" but "what wouldst Thou have *me* to do?" You may remember that when our Lord said to St. Peter, after His resurrection, "Follow me," and St. Peter, seeing St. John following as well, said, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" our Lord replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me!" And indeed each man knows best concerning himself what he is able to do. One has money, and another has time, and another has a ready tongue, and another has a power of organization and arrange-

ment ; and all these good gifts will be brought out, and will help each other, and be turned to the best account, if only each person will go into his own chamber, and kneel down before Him Who seeth in secret, and say with a determination to listen to the answer to the question, " Lord, what wouldst Thou have *me* to do ? "

5. Lastly, we come to the words " to do." I think that those are very comforting words ; and for this reason, namely, that every one can do something. When our Lord described God's Kingdom under the figure of a king, who went away and gave his servants money which they were to improve by diligence, you may remember that he is said to have given " to every man according to his several ability " : and this is just the principle upon which God deals with us—upon which He deals with you. He does not expect the poor man to do that which requires money, nor the simple to do that which requires great intellect, nor the man to do that which requires the gentleness and tact of a woman, nor the woman to do that which requires the strength and endurance of a man ; but He does expect each one to do what he can, and to do it willingly, and to do it thoroughly. Moreover we may say that there is an emphasis in the words *to do*, which distinguishes them from such words as *to speculate*, or *to dream*. A great many persons seem to live as if they were born to *speculate* and to *dream*, not to *do*. I do not say that even a life of speculation may not be that for which some bright intellects have been created by God ; but speculation is not that for which most men are sent into the world ; it is by *doing* God's will that we shall most readily grow in grace, and help our brethren. Aye, and to *do* may sometimes mean, as it did partly in St. Paul's case, to suffer. " I will show him," said the Lord, " how great things he must *suffer* for My Name's sake." And so I can conceive a poor afflicted child of God, lying upon a bed of suffering, and saying, " Lord, what wouldst Thou have *me* to do ? " And I can conceive the answer coming thus, " Lie there and wait patiently My summons to come up higher—that is what *you* are to do, that is the way in which *you* are to make *your* contribution to the work of the Church militant upon earth."

There is just one more remark, which may be made upon this phrase " to do." There are two words in the Greek, which are both translated by this same English phrase " to do." Scholars tell us that one of them represents more perfect *doing* than the other. One might be used of him, who should do and fail ; while the other would apply better to him, who should do and succeed. You may find an example of the use of both words in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. The word *acts* or *deeds* of the Apostles is derived from the first word ; but when we read in chap. I. 1., that " Jesus began to *do* and to teach," the word used is the second. Now it is perhaps not without intention, that this second more perfect kind of *doing* is that which is pointed at in the text : one might have thought it more probable that St. Paul would have been content to say, " What shall I *attempt*—what shall I *try*—what shall I *endeavour* to do ? " But, as a matter of fact, he used a word which seems to imply success ; as though to attempt to do that, which Christ wishes to have done, ensured a triumphant completion. Anyhow, brethren, I think we may very well take a hint with regard to our own prayers as to what we shall do. When we ask our Lord Jesus Christ the question which St. Paul asked Him, we should do well to remember, that if He commands us to do a thing we may confidently reckon upon success. I do not mean that we shall never be disappointed—nothing of the kind. God does break down many a cherished hope, and frustrate many an elaborate scheme. He teaches us by the discipline of broken plans, and ruined efforts, and sometimes by the martyrdom of the choicest captains of His army, that His ways are not as our ways nor His thoughts as our thoughts ; still, if we are sure that it is His will that we are doing,

we may be certain that somehow or another all will be well at last, and that we like Daniel shall "stand in our lot at the end of the days."

So much then, my dear fellow-workers in the vineyard of Jesus Christ our common Lord, for the words of my text. Take them home with you ; and if any of you write up in your bedrooms, as many people do, texts of Holy Scripture to admonish you from time to time, let this be amongst your texts, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" And I have just one more word to say about it, and then I will let you go to your homes. The answer of Christ to St. Paul was that he should "go into the city, and there it should be told him what he should do" ; and accordingly, as you will remember, St. Paul did go into the city, and the Lord sent a disciple, one Ananias, to speak to him and to guide him on his way. Now I mention this, because I think it may be taken as a good indication of the truth, that God makes use of common means to teach His disciples what they are to do. St. Paul did not at once assume that he knew everything, and could do everything, because he had seen Jesus Christ in the way ; but he listened to Ananias, who was already a disciple of Jesus Christ, and was content to be taught by him. The lesson that I gather for Church-workers is this, that they need humility as well as zeal, wisdom and discretion as well as courage, submission to those who are set over them in the Lord as well as determination to do God's will. Oh ! if we could have such Church-workers in every parish as I have endeavoured to shew you that you ought to be, what might we not hope for the parish, what might we not hope for the diocese of which such parishes were the component parts ?

A New Year's Question

BY REV. JAMES MORISON, D.D.

"*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?*"—*Acts ix. 6.*

When entering on a New Year, the soul is naturally thrown into a prospective attitude. It knows that it cannot recall the past. It knows that the present is hasting into the future. And if it be at all desirous to "redeem the time," no language can more properly and adequately express the burden of its longing than that of our text, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?"

The language, you perceive, is of an ascending character. It looks upward, not downward. There is elevation in it. There is everything the reverse in it of what is degrading and grovelling. It is altogether different from the language that would be the fitting vehicle of the cherished thoughts and feelings of the millions :—What shall we eat ? What shall we drink ? Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? How shall we grow rich ? By what means might we succeed in pampering the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eye, the pride of our life ? Such questions as these are of a descending character. They are of the earth, earthly and earthy. But the question before us, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" has in it something of the noble, and of the spiritually aspiring. It claps its wings and soars away—away.

But I would have you to consider, not only whither the question goeth, and that it ascends, but also whence it cometh. From what kind of mind does it arise ? And what would need to be the state of our mind, if every one were wishful to exclaim in the reality of earnestness, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?"

In reply to such queries as these, I would say that the language of my text arises from a believing mind. It was after Saul of Tarsus had seen himself in a new light, a light from Heaven shining round about him ; it was after he had fallen to the earth a humbled man ; it was after he had heard the Lord, Whom he had been

persecuting, say to him, "I am Jesus"; it was then that the words rose up from him, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The word "Lord" refers to Jesus: and when Saul employed the word, his mind was in the attitude of faith. He believed in Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah, the Christ, the divinely appointed Saviour. He believed that Jesus was a Saviour for him. And it was in the consciousness of this belief that he felt the love of Jesus constraining him to say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It was the first cry of a new-born babe in Christ. The exclamation was the first prayer of a man converted from the error of his way.

And it is, dear friends, because I am desirous that all of us should unite in earnestly exclaiming, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" that I would urge upon such as have not yet believed in Jesus as "all their salvation," as their Saviour, now to "behold the Lamb of God" bearing their sin, together with the sins of the world. My fellow-sinners, the Lord did lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. He laid on Him your iniquity. And He was smitten in your stead. He was bruised for your iniquities, wounded for your transgressions. He offered Himself up as a Sacrifice for your sins—a propitiatory sacrifice. And the holy, holy, holy Sovereign of the universe is now satisfied, and ready, and willing, and wishful to forgive you, and to bless you as if you had not sinned. O believe the glad tidings. Trust your soul to the Sacrifice of Christ. And let the love that impelled the Saviour to make the sacrifice constrain you now to exclaim in your spirit, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

But I would ask you now to notice that this exclamation, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is more than a mere exclamation. It is, as we have already indicated, a prayer. It is therefore the expression of spiritual modesty, and of the consciousness of spiritual want. Behold, he who once persecuted Jesus now prays to Jesus. So great is the change which is produced by beholding Jesus as one's Saviour. Saul of Tarsus was formerly utterly careless about Jesus. He was more than careless. He was opposed to Him. He disliked Him. He would have none of Him. He was full of self-sufficiency, so far as his relation to Jesus was concerned. He did not feel that he needed to be dependent on the bounty of Jesus. He disdained to be a spiritual pensioner of Jesus. He did not realise that there was an emptiness in his soul, which could not be filled out of any other fulness than that of Jesus. He did not imagine that there was a fulness in Jesus out of which he could draw for ever to fill every actual and possible emptiness in his own soul. He was far from desiring to travel daily, in spirit, between his own emptiness and Christ's fulness. But no! sooner did he see Christ as his Saviour than, behold, all old things passed away within him, and all things became new. He felt his emptiness, his utter self-insufficiency, and he felt assured that what he needed for his present and perpetual bliss was in Jesus.

And this his primary prayer will be yours too, my fellow-sinner, if you now behold in Jesus One Who is your Saviour, and all your salvation. Whosoever believes in Jesus learns and loves to pray. His thoughts follow Jesus. They rise up into the world of spirit, in which Jesus is. His desires follow his thoughts. They, too, rise up into the world of spirit. They rise up to Jesus. They rise up in modesty and meekness, in the consciousness of entire self-insufficiency, and of absolute dependence for guidance and bliss. And their burden is this, "Lord Jesus, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Is this the prayer that is now ascending from each of us? If it be, the new year, thus begun with appropriate prayer, will, methinks, be most probably delightfully ended, in the experience of very many with equally appropriate and rapturous praise.

But I would remark again that the prayer, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " indicates a spirit characterised by renunciation of self-will and genuine consecration to the will of Jesus. " Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do ? " Such renunciation of self-will and consecration to the will of Jesus is the very essence of practical Christianity, and the secret of perpetual contentment and ever-increasing bliss. If the world were unanimous in such self-renunciation in will, and in consecration to the will of Jesus, then wars, jealousies of nations, and selfishness in business and in every thing else would cease. Sensualism in every form and phase would disappear. The canker of envy would be rooted out. No man would seek to use his fellow-man as a mere tool. No class would seek to override the interests of other classes. No monopolies would be desired or maintained. No incubus of taxation would be required to support armies and navies, and pay for the vices and folly of the ruling or the ruled. Earth would at once be paradise restored. The wheels of society would be oiled and the machine of the universal community, and communions of men, would go on for ever smoothly and harmoniously. If once the earnest prayer of every man on earth were this, " Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do ? " the millennium would be inaugurated, and as the state of the body is influenced, and ultimately and in the course of generations ruled by the state of mind, diseases and all deformation would gradually die out. Every man would become good and beautiful and happy.

And never will mankind be right ; never will there be true and pure satisfaction in every clime and for every people ; never will the race realise its brotherhood and act like one vast family circle of the loving and the loved, until there be a universal turning to Jesus, the true Brother of every man, the only Saviour and the only absolute Lord, until the cry go up to Him from every heart, " Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do ? "

But alas ! the world at large will not yet be persuaded to turn to Jesus. It will never be persuaded in the mass. All methods of statesmanship, all systems of government ; and all schemes of reform, which seek to operate on men in the mass, and to make them all prosperous even while they remain unconverted to Jesus and to God, will and must utterly fail. Men must be won over to Jesus in units, individual by individual, here a cluster and there a cluster, here a chapelful and there a chapelful, here a town and there a city, here a kingdom and there a country, until by-and-by, as the leaven continues to work, the whole lump of humanity becomes interpenetrated and converted. It is by individuals turning to Jesus and saying, " Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do ? " that the mighty evangelising movement will go on, the company of those who constitute it being " fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible " to evil " as an army with banners." And he who would share in the glory of helping on this world-regenerating movement must tarry no longer. He should now, on this first day of the new year, turn to Jesus and say, " Thou art all my salvation ; and all my desire." " Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do ? "

Ananias and Saul

BY REV. JOHN FAWCETT, M.A.

" *There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias,*" &c.—Acts ix. 10-19.

Damascus was one of the rich and luxurious cities of the East. Its fountains and gardens, and the beauty of its situation seemed to point it out as the abode of pleasure. As an instance of this it is recorded of Mahomet, that coming near to

Damascus, he took his station at an adjoining eminence for some time in order to view the city ; and considering the delightfulness of the scene, would not tempt his frailty by entering into it ; but instantly departed with this reflection—that there was but one paradise designed for man ; and for his part he was resolved not to take his in this world. The story is entitled to little credit, since Mahomet was not famous for self-denial, or for contempt of earthly pleasures ; yet it may serve to show the deliciousness of the place.

But whatever Damascus might be in the opinion of Mahomet, or from its natural advantages, the poor Christians who dwelt there found it no paradise to them. Pointed at by the finger of scorn ; and hunted by fiery persecution, they passed their days in fear, except so far as they were supported by their faith in Christ and by joy in the Holy Ghost. Among these was Ananias, of whom we know nothing more than that he was a converted Jew of good report among his brethren. His very name, like that of many other godly men, would have remained unknown, were it not for the part which he was called to take in the important transaction which we are reviewing.

To him the Lord appeared in a vision—I dare not, with some commentators, say a dream ; for not a word is said which should lead one to conclude that he was asleep—all the word of the Lord to him is as to a waking man, whose attention had first to be summoned, instructions then to be communicated to him, and his objections removed. His attention is first summoned : he is called by name, “ Ananias,” on which he answers, as if ready to hear and to obey any command, “ Behold, here I am, Lord.” It looks like the language of one who was prepared to go on any errand, to perform any work. Alas ! if he thought so, he was like many who before they are tried think there is no service which they would not do, no danger which they would not face ; but when the commandment comes, then they feel the difficulty and the peril which before they scarcely perceived. The service actually charged upon Ananias was one which he was utterly unprepared to expect, and which seemed to him a sort of desperate attempt. It appeared as if he was commanded to throw himself into the very mouth of a lion, when he was instructed to go to a specified street and house, and there inquire for Saul of Tarsus. What could he expect from Saul of Tarsus but to be seized and sent to Jerusalem ? And yet the instruction given him was accompanied with such a detail of circumstances as ought to have removed his fears and encouraged his hopes of success.

The very first reason which was offered why he should go to Saul might have been sufficient to remove every doubt—“ Behold, he prayeth.” The prayer of Saul then was real prayer. God Himself being judge, he prayed in truth. Ananias knew this, and therefore he should have apprehended no evil from Saul ; should not have despaired of any good. Men may repeat the form of prayer, and yet may devise and perpetrate evil ; they may repeat the form of prayer, and yet refuse to obey the word of God. Many say their prayers, and rise from their prayer to practise iniquity. But no man ever prays in earnest, and then rises to commit iniquity ; no man ever prays in earnest, and retains a spirit which fights against the truth of God. Whoever prays in truth is ready to obey the will of God, though hard, and to believe His word, though contrary to his former prejudices.

This, therefore, was one circumstance which ought to have removed every fear from the breast of Ananias. But there was another. He was told that God had prepared Saul in a vision to expect him—that he had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand upon him that he might receive his sight. He was taught, therefore, to expect that when he went to Saul he should go to a

blind man, who, when his name was mentioned would know that he was the person, on whose laying on of hands his sight should be restored. These considerations should have made Ananias go at the Divine command with great alacrity ; they should have made him full of hope that he should go, as a missionary of mercy, to one, who was once a persecutor, but was now a penitent. But it was not so. Such is the weakness of faith even in good men, that the terror of Saul's name, and the remembrance of what he had been, weighed with Ananias against the Divine declaration of what he was become, and of the things which had been shown him. He objected. He urged the character of Saul ; as if there were any guilt too great for the Divine mercy to do away, any hardness of heart too strong for Divine grace to subdue —“ Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem ; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name.”

But the Lord's ways are not as men's ways, nor His thoughts as the thoughts of men. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than their ways, and His thoughts than their thoughts. Even those who have themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious are apt to have very inadequate notions of the greatness of His mercy. The length and breadth and depth and height of His love, they are slow to apprehend. Certainly the thoughts of Ananias respecting Saul were not as the Lord's thoughts. He looked on Saul as one, of whom, on account of his enormous wickedness, there was no hope. The Lord regarded that same Saul as a chosen vessel, who should bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. But though he was thus to go forth as the ambassador of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, he was not to go forth with pomp and splendour, but in poverty and hardship. And he was to know this. He was to undertake his work with the understanding that in every city bonds and imprisonment awaited him. “ I will show him,” says the Lord, “ how great things he must suffer for My name's sake.”

A truly Christian man may sometimes stagger through unbelief and flinch from duty ; but he will not be obstinate in refusing it. Moses at first was unwilling to go in to Pharaoh, and despaired of delivering the children of Israel ; but he afterwards stood boldly before the king, and accomplished the deliverance of his people. So Ananias for a time shrunk from the service of going to Saul, but when assured of the Divine purpose concerning him, he hesitated no longer, but repairing to the house of Judas, and putting his hands on the blind and humbled persecutor, accosted him in terms of Christian love—“ Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” The effect immediately followed—“ There fell from his eyes, as it had been scales, and he received sight.” And, no doubt, together with his bodily eyes, the eyes of his understanding were opened.

His faith, we may conceive, was now strengthened to believe in Jesus for the remission of sins. He now saw, what he afterwards taught, that where sin had abounded grace had much more abounded. He saw that the love of Christ rose higher than even his sin. He ventured to throw himself into the arms of that very Jesus Whom he had persecuted. The remission of his sins was sealed to him in the ordinance of baptism. His conscience was now purged ; the blood of sprinkling was applied ; the burden of guilt was removed ; he was filled with joy and with peace. It was the time of his espousals, the Bridegroom was come, the days of his sorrow and humiliation were ended. He could fast no more, but with gladness of heart received meat, and was strengthened.

Let us now consider this blessed change both as it was designed from eternity

in the Divine purpose, and as it was accomplished at the appointed time in the Divine dealings with Saul. No doubt the Lord had loved this chosen vessel with an everlasting love, and had thoughts of mercy and peace toward him even when he was a persecutor. But it was not His intention to bestow the blessing unasked; He would be inquired of for it; it was a thing which if not sought should not be obtained. Saul should wrestle in prayer with strong crying and tears, if peradventure the Lord would be intreated, and he, so great a sinner, might find mercy.

What was told to Ananias, that he was a chosen vessel, was not told to him. It was not revealed to him that mercy was unchangeably laid up in store for him in the Divine purpose. Respecting that purpose he was entirely in the dark; all he knew was that he was a grievous transgressor, and that it must be rich grace indeed that could pardon him. For that pardoning grace he was become a humble importunate pleader; and this is the thing which the Lord specially notices concerning him when He sends Ananias to inquire for him at the house of Judas—"Behold, he prayeth." But the praying soul needs some encouragement; and it may be profitable to notice what degree of encouragement was given to Saul. He knew the writings of the Old Testament, and the promises therein contained to those who confess their sins. We may be well assured that he would plead these promises; and no small support would he derive from the large and comprehensive terms in which they are expressed—"Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."

Nor was there wanting, from the very first, some word of encouragement, addressed specially to himself. When it was said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do," he might obtain from this direction a glimmering of hope that the Lord had some intention of favour towards him. It contained not indeed a word of promise; but why instruct him, why tell him what he should do, if no end was to be answered by his doing it? While he prayed, therefore, he would be looking for the instruction in whatever way it was to come, whether by immediate revelation or by some one sent to teach him. And he would not be without hope that together with the instruction there would be an intimation of mercy, that whom the Lord vouchsafed to teach, him He would also be inclined to spare. Thus from the very first he would be able to discover some token for good in his being directed to go into the city with the information that it should be told him what he should do: for what else could such a direction mean than—what he should do to be saved.

So much of encouragement, amid all his fears and distress of conscience, he had from the very first. It does not appear in which of the three days he had the vision wherein he saw Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. But at whatever period it did occur, it would tend greatly to relieve his fears, and to comfort him with the expectation of mercy. And when his vision was realized, and a stranger announced by the name of Ananias, how would that expectation be heightened, and something akin to joy take possession of his soul. O what music to his ear would there be in the words "Brother Saul," when addressed to him by the lips of a Christian man. And when on the laying on of that good man's hands the scales fell from his eyes, what words can express his happiness? He was brought out of darkness into light, both in a bodily and in a spiritual sense. His bodily eyes were opened, and he saw the light of day; and God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in his heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Happy man! He now received "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning,

the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." He was now ready, through whatever sufferings, to serve the Saviour Whom he loved, content through evil report and good report, through honour or dishonour, whether counted a deceiver, or acknowledged as true, to bear testimony to the Gospel of that Grace of God by which he himself had been saved, and which he knew to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believed.

Ananias of Damascus

BY REV. WILLIAM BROCK.

"There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias."—Acts ix. 10.

Most of us have, at one time or another, watched a little steam-tug busily towing some great sailing ship down stream or out of harbour into the deep broad sea. To the spectator's eye, the tug is almost extinguished by the giant hull that floats behind. It returns unnoticed into port, while, observed of all observers, the big ship spreads her white sails to the breeze, and, like a noble bird upon the wing, speeds her silent but majestic flight across the waves.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the glorious work which he afterwards achieved, are among the household words of our Christian communities, and the fundamental evidences of our Christian faith. Every one is familiar with the start of that goodly vessel, with the voyages it made, and the precious cargoes which it carried back. But that ship also had its steam-tug. There was one man made by God the instrument of drawing Saul out, as a new creature in Christ Jesus, on his apostolic career. He appears at the crisis, does the work appointed to him, then vanishes, and we see him no more. What information we possess is to be gathered from the two parallel accounts given in the ninth and twenty-second chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The result is full of interest, and cannot be devoid of instruction.

"There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias." Damascus ! The name carries us away across the Syrian desert to that ancient city, seated between its rushing streams, and in its fair oasis of grove and garden. How a Christian Church had grown together there we know not ; but some of the scattered disciples may have fled thither after Stephen's death, and converts were doubtless added to them from among the native Jews, who formed a numerous and powerful synagogue. Thus far Jews and Christians seem to have lived on peaceable and even friendly terms, far removed from the heats and controversies of Jerusalem. Ananias himself was universally respected. He was known as "a devout man according to the law," and "had a good report of all the Jews which dwelt in Damascus." Such are the men whom our Lord loves to employ upon His errands, men of unblemished character, "sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

It does not follow that Ananias held any official position in the Church at Damascus. Tradition, indeed, has made him its bishop, and given him a history, crowned with a martyr's death ; but the conjecture is without foundation. We have quite as much right to consider him a private Christian, with no special gift of public speech or pastoral authority, but holding the warrant which belongs, as we conceive, to all disciples, to preach the Gospel, to assure the anxious of forgiveness, and to baptize the believer. The kind of commission which was now to be confided to Ananias is only what may come to any one of us, and for which we should seek to be prepared. True, the Lord spoke to him "in a vision" ; but He may

speaking with equal emphasis by the whisper of His Spirit, or the indication of His providence; and our attitude, like his, must be that of the girded loins and watchful eye—"Behold, I am here, Lord."

The work prepared for Ananias is now unfolded to him. A long street, straight as an arrow, used to run through the heart of Damascus from east to west, and the line of it, though much broken, can still be traced. In that "street called Straight" stood a certain house, belonging to a well-known citizen, "the house of Judas"; and in that house there lies a blind man, wanting help, which Ananias is to give. The man is expecting him, indeed; for he too has had a vision, and it was a vision of such an one coming in, and laying healing hands upon his darkened eyes. And mark the motive urged for going. "Behold, he prayeth"; that is the sight which attracts the eye of the Lord, and ought to kindle the zeal of the disciples. Are you beginning to pray? Do the feelings of your heart find vent in broken sighs and whispered words of supplication? The ear of Christ has caught the sound. It comes floating up to the high heavens, through all the thunder of the Angels' adoration, and the ceaseless murmur of the universe, heard as surely as an infant's cry reaches the mother's ear amidst the bustle of the house. He turns at the call, and His eye is straightway bent on the city, the street, the house, the very room where you kneel in prayer. He sees you; and where the eye of Jesus rests, there His heart, His hands, His feet are swift to follow. He will stir up some Ananias to come with words of help to you.

The street is called Straight, the house is the house of Judas, and so far all is plain; but the man in the house—what is his name? The sound of his name fell like a thunderbolt; "inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus." A name too familiar in Christian ears! Saul, the bigoted Pharisee, the furious persecutor, the blasphemer who taught others also to blaspheme! It was he who had stood prominent at Stephen's martyrdom, and who then, like a young tiger that had tasted blood, flew at the flock, and carried havoc, desolation, and death into the very heart of the Church. He had come to Damascus on the same brutal work, with authority to bind and imprison every Christian Jew. Shall Ananias put his head into the tiger's mouth? Shall he carry the pearl of the Gospel and cast it down at the feet of its bitterest calumniator? "Lord, I have heard by many of this man," and I had rather not have anything to do with him! How often has the same answer started to our lips at some distasteful call of duty. What is the use of exposing ourselves to insult and opposition? What but a miracle of grace will make such a man believe?

But these difficult errands are really our noblest opportunities. "Go thy way," Ananias; thou art to have part in a work with the fame of which the world shall ring! That persecutor is already turned from his fierce purpose; he has before him the destiny of a Christian Apostle and Martyr; he is to witness for the faith before kings and in distant heathen lands, and to suffer to the very death for the name which he before blasphemed. "He is a chosen vessel unto Me." To that devout disciple it is granted to take Saul of Tarsus by the hand, to introduce him into the Church, and to send him forth upon his mission of self-sacrifice. May there be no such honours waiting for us? John Bunyan was first enlightened by the simple Christian talk of some poor women, spinning on the summer's evening at their cottage doors. Sir Hope Grant is said to have been brought out of utter indifference by overhearing a group of private soldiers at prayer. The mouse lets loose the lion. Only let us cultivate simplicity and faith, and yield a prompt obedience to the call of duty, and to us, too, may fall some glorious trophy of divine favour; for the wolf, and the leopard, and the young lion shall lie down together in the Kingdom of our Lord, "and a little child shall lead them."

Brave believer as he was, Ananias went his way, reached the house, and found the man. He seems like some skilful and friendly physician in his treatment of the difficult case. He shows us how to deal with the anxious and inquiring who may come under our eyes and seek aid at our hands.

The first thing that strikes us is the tenderness of his treatment. Here stands Ananias, face to face with Saul the persecutor. Before him lies the man whose hands have been imbrued in Christian blood, and in whose wily head have been ripening cruel schemes for the extermination of the Church. He would have had Ananias himself in prison before now, if he had not been hindered. But it is all forgotten and forgiven by his visitor. Friendly hands are laid on those blind eyes, and a voice, full of pathos and pity, falls gently on the waiting ears. "Brother Saul!" It was the very salutation with which one Christian was wont to salute another. It breathed so different a spirit from the stiff and rigid Pharisaism of Judea. It seemed to take in the poor forlorn sinner to a family fireside, with its warmth and light. Ay, if we want to do men good, they must be our "brothers" too. Never stand, like some old pillar-saint, on your high pedestal of virtue, and talk down to the people at your feet. Go and sit at their side; put your hands on them; make them feel at home with you; and even if you have to do with the most wicked, speak to him as man to man, on the common footing of the love of God.

There is, moreover, a certain cheerful assurance to be noted in the tone which Ananias takes. He might have come to that chief of sinners robed in the blackness of darkness, and with stern words of condemnation on his lips. He comes with words of hope and with acts of blessing; "that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." He comes to tell him of the great mission on which he is to go, and the honour to be put upon him, as Christ's witness to the heathen world. The falling of the scales from Saul's eyes was but a symbol of the spiritual enlightenment which Ananias was permitted to bring to his benighted soul. Pardon and peace with God; mercy abounding over the darkest guilt, and melting the hardest heart; blessed service to spring from the joy of such salvation, and to be graciously accepted: this is the message which he bears, even to such an one as Saul. May I bear it, in my turn? May I go to penitent men, and tell them of absolution and acceptance? What a commission we Christians have, and with what alacrity should it be done! Happy must be the surgeon who with delicate skill can give sight back to the blinded eye, and bid it look out once more on sky and earth, and springing flowers, and human faces. But higher and happier still the calling of the disciple, who may carry his Master's Gospel to the bewildered heart, who may see the light of Heaven dawn out of its darkness, and send forth a brother man rejoicing on his pilgrimage to the eternal sunshine of Heaven.

Nor will Ananias reckon his task complete because he has shown his sympathy and delivered his message of mercy. There is a practical wisdom and faithfulness in his ministry to Saul well worthy our imitation. We preach the Gospel to men, and then too often we let them go. We are so afraid of the taunt of proselytizing that we half shrink even from speaking of baptism or Church membership to the objects of our Christian anxiety. The result is that there are so many converts who float from church to church, or who affect to be above all human fellowships of religion. It matters much to a young disciple that he should be clearly told what to do next. It mattered much to Saul. And now to his own eager inquiry, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" comes the appropriate answer, "Arise and be baptized," as a pledge of faith and a token of forgiveness; and then, "join thyself to the disciples." Was it not a joyful day when Ananias entered

the Christian assembly, leading by the hand that changed and humbled man, and witnessed the good profession which he made? And have you found an anxious soul, and been the means of guiding it to Christ? That is good; but now complete your work. Bring your friend into the Church. Bring him among fellow-Christians, whose experience may instruct and edify him, and with whom he may find a spiritual home.

A Minister of Grace

BY REV. J. H. JOWETT, M.A.

"A certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias."—Acts ix. 10.

I like the descriptive name by which this gracious servant is introduced to us. "A certain disciple." He was a pupil, a scholar in the school of Christ. And from that fact alone I infer two things. First, he was a brave man. It was a valorous thing to be in the school at all. Nowadays little or no courage is required to be identified with Jesus Christ. Nay, to be enlisted in His company is frequently a pass-port to favour. But in these olden days the Lord and His society were greatly hated, and all manner of mischievous ministries were planned against their peace. And then, in the second place, he was a docile man, for how could he be other if he were in the school of the Lord? He was willing to unlearn, to go into his life, and tear down the prejudices and old modes of thinking which had become part of his very life. For prejudices can become so intimately one with our beings that they cling to us like a vital skin. Ananias was willing to peel off these mental habits, and he clothed himself with thoughts and ideals of quite another kind. His spirit was eager for the truth, and therefore he was absorbent of it.

"And the Lord said unto him in a vision." Let us not lift this vision quite away from the common lot, as though no such revelation were given to men to-day. Ananias had most likely heard of Saul's mission to Damascus. Grave rumours had already reached the little Christian community of the havoc he was working on the way. Fear was already awake, and the disciples were bewildered. What should Ananias do when Saul arrived? What would the Lord have him do? And so he prayed about it. Now what happens when we pray? If we pray in deep sincerity, and with singleness of purpose, two things will most assuredly take place. Our spirits will be brought into harmony with the Spirit of God. Our desires will be tuned to the acceptance of His will. And then, in the second place, our judgments will be refined to the perception of the will we seek to know. There is nothing more sure than this. Men who humbly bow in the presence of the Lord will not be permitted to "walk in darkness." "The meek will He guide in judgment," and they shall understand the way of the Lord. Thus Ananias was praying and meditating with the intent of discovering the will of the King. And while Ananias continued in the mood of prayer "the Lord said unto him in a vision!" Not a vision as a spectacle, but a vision as an apprehension. Things began to clear up, the confusion began to shape itself into distinct purpose, and he got the mind of God.

And this is our resource, too. In our times of bewilderment we are to spread out the complexity before the Lord. We must bring the tangled web into His presence, and He will give us the clue.

And what was the substance of the vision? "Go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire for one called Saul." I have said that Ananias

shrank from the task. Saul's appalling past came before him in lurid and affrighting outline. He wondered what it all meant. Was it all a subtle conspiracy to entrap the little Christian church at Damascus? What shall he do? This is what he did: he remained a little longer in the fellowship of God. "Lord, I have heard of this man!" And then another vision is given unto him. The Lord shines again into his mind. "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me." And with this confirmatory vision all the fears of Ananias were dispersed. And that must be our way, too. We must linger in the light until the clouds and cloudlets of our fears melt away. We must commune with our Lord until all our hesitations pass, as I have many times seen the shroud of white mist melt away from the hills, and the outlines of the headlands have become clear.

Now then, clear, and assured, what will Ananias do? "And Ananias departed and entered into the house." From the place of prayer he walked to the place of duty. You may depend upon it that, once assured of God's mind and of God's presence, there was no dilly-dallying on the way. He went as the ambassador of the King, and he took the shortest way to his commission.

And what will this prayer-prepared man do when he enters the house? "And, laying his hands on him, he said, Brother Saul." Could you imagine a more exquisitely tender approach? See the miracle of grace in the transformation of this disciple. What a contrast there is between these two phrases: "I have heard from many of this man"; "Brother Saul!" Don't you think he has caught the way of the Lord? Don't you think that Saul would melt into tears under the speech of his strange visitor? And perhaps the tears of his penitence had something to do with the restoration of his sight. Ananias comes in benediction. The intended victim becomes the minister of the persecutor's blessing. And in all this there is an outstanding lesson. If we would have the right approach to a man we must pray for him. We shall do more harm than good if we address ourselves to redemptive work with unprepared spirits. When we pray for an enemy the harshness departs from our own souls. We cast out the evil spirits of brusqueness and clumsiness and resentment. When we pray for an enemy we conciliate ourselves. We change our fear into fellowship, and it becomes an instinctive thing to go to our persecutor and address him by the Christian name of "Brother."

"Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, Who appeared unto thee in the way thou camest, hath sent me." How gracious and tender is the continuance of the approach! He immediately links on the Lord Jesus to his own tender and compassionate speech. First, the touch of brotherhood, and then the introduction of the Saviour. And surely that is the way for all the disciples of the Lord. We must first of all impress men with the sense of our brotherhood before they will listen to our speech about our Saviour. We must let men taste the sweetness of our sympathy if we would entice them to the ultimate fountains of grace and love. I think that Saul would say to himself, "If this is the King's ambassador, what must the King be like? If this is a single flower from the garden, what must the garden be like? If His disciple makes a brother of me surely the Lord will not disown me!" And hope leaped into his soul like the kindling of a great light.

"He hath sent me," and what for? "That thou mayest receive thy sight." The first ministry is to the man's infirmity. The first succour was the opening of the eyes, in order that he might look upon his new-found friend, and in the light of that friend's face discover the beauty of the Lord. "And be filled with the Holy Spirit." He was to be brought into a marvellous communion with the Divine. The Lord Whom he had persecuted was now to become his abiding Guest. It was a day of wonders for Saul of Tarsus!

And now, after this superlative ministry Ananias drops out of sight. An obscure man has led a great man into life and light and liberty. A very humble lamp well-trimmed and shining can show the way to the palace of the King.

The Repentance of Saul

BY REV. GEORGE TUGWELL, M.A.

"Saul, of Tarsus."—*Acts ix. 11.*

The repentance of Saul is like a flash of lightning. Sometimes out in the wild and trackless deserts of the east there is a roar of thunder, and at the same instant a thin line of blinding fire darts into the midst of the windy, shifting sand. There remains a core of fused and shining glassy slag. The nature of the sand is changed once for all—in a moment and for ever. That is the work of the fire of Heaven. The conversion of Saul was like that. Not only was it sudden, instantaneous, but there was no after-relapse or change of condition.

These are facts: they are not questioned. But many a preacher of righteousness has wished in his secret heart that Saul had never been converted, at least in this fashion, because the story of this instantaneous irreversible conversion of his has been so often turned to the worst of uses.

You know, no doubt, the mischief which has been made of it, and which still is made of it.

It is said that it is the pattern, the only true likeness, of every real repentance. It is said that there is no possible repentance unless it is of this sort. It is said that, at some certain, definite, ascertainable, and ascertained instant, the Spirit of God leaps into a man's heart like lightning, and that the change, the needful saving change, is effected once for all. It is said that before this flash a man is a lost man, condemned and sentenced to death for the sin of Adam, and after the flash he is safe, must be saved, cannot sin such sin as to make him lose Heaven. It is said that this event is quite independent of yourself and others, and that you cannot be saved unless it chances to happen to you.

Now, I do not suppose that it would be useful or interesting to you if I were to take much trouble to prove the falsity of this dreary and sectarian theory. I do not suppose that there is a single person in this Church who believes it, or could believe it.

If it be true, every Christian's fate does not depend in any measure upon what the Bible calls faith, or upon his repentance, or upon the energising power of the death of Christ, but simply upon a foregone conclusion. Some are destined to be saved, some to be lost. It matters not what we do, since we cannot help ourselves. This is the creed of the fatalist, than which there is nothing more hopeless or terrible.

And if it be true, the vast bulk of mankind is condemned to eternal misery; for but the fewest have experience of this sort of conversion: probably, not one of us in this building can say that at such and such an instant we were made sensible of the power of God, and of the fact that we are absolutely and for ever saved and safe. But the Bible says, on the contrary that the "many" are called, whilst it is also true that of these a "few," a comparatively small proportion, persevere in the way to Heaven, and so are numbered with the chosen, "the elect," the ultimate saints of God.

But an all-sufficient argument is that the doctrine of the Catholic Church

accords with the Bible in this point. The Church teaches us that in Holy Baptism we are all made members of the Church of Christ, children of the family of God, and heirs of Heaven. At that time, among other times, there is a call—our feet are set in the way to peace. And those who persevere to the end are chosen—to them the Kingdom comes; whilst they who reject Christ and choose to fall away, arrive at that final doom which they have won for themselves.

Conversion is a word which is used in the Bible in a totally different way from that in which it occurs in the theory of which I have been speaking. It is used nine times in the New Testament, and on each occasion it means neither more nor less than “a turning towards God.” It is used alike of heathen and of Christians. It is used both passively and actively. Of the Jews, our Lord said that they closed their eyes lest they should be converted and be healed. Of His disciples our Lord said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Of St. Peter He said, “When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.” Of Christian converts St. James says, “If any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death.”

So it is plain that this “conversion” may occur to any one at any time, may occur to the same person *over and over again*. So often as a man’s face is turned away from God, either from ignorance, or by wilful sin, so often it may be turned towards God again. So often, also, he himself may turn his face Godwards. And since we all sin many times, and are all liable to go wrong, it is evident that the times of our conversion must be many; if we are to be lifted out of the mire and tangles of the pilgrim’s devious progress, and arrive victorious at the gates of Paradise.

Conversion, of course, may be instantaneous. But it is not necessarily irreversible, since every Christian must, like St. Peter, know many such moments of recovery; and may, like Judas, fall away at last.

It is not, necessarily, repentance. If taken *passively*, it is a part of repentance—it is the beginning of repentance—that first moment of inward grace which sets repentance stirring and going in a man’s heart. A man may be said to be converted, when God rouses him from sin to a sense of insecurity, unhappiness, and danger. If taken *actively*, it may be said to include the whole process of repentance. If a man who is awakened from the depths of sin stirs himself, gathers himself together, sets his will into action, and then goes on through contrition, satisfaction, and amendment, to be reinstated in the place from which he has lapsed—that, the whole long series of events, which may last for days or years, that is a turning of himself towards God; that, then, is neither more nor less than repentance. So that there is conversion at Baptism, at Confirmation, at every act of Holy Communion, and at every penitential season and hour throughout the whole of a man’s life.

Now, let us go on to see what there was which was peculiar or unusual in the Repentance of St. Paul.

Of course, there was one thing which was abnormal—miraculous—and that was the manner in which he was aroused by the voice of Jesus Christ Himself.

That does not affect the connection of the story with ourselves. All we need say is that many men are roused in many ways—some in one way, some in another: St. Paul by a special miracle—this man by an accident, a shipwreck, or a collision—that man by the sudden death of a friend—another by an illness—another by a sermon, or a book, or a word—another by the sting of his conscience, which was sleeping, and woke up suddenly and did its work in his heart.

But all the rest of the process of repentance—the course of it—is always independent of the awakening cause, whatever it may be.

It depends upon the man himself, how he will answer to the stimulus, whatever it may be.

Two men have been just recovered from the river, and are lying insensible and seemingly dead side by side. The stimulus of friction or galvanism is applied to them simultaneously. Both recover: but the movements of one are rapid, energetic, and muscularly powerful, and he is quickly himself again; whereas the other is lethargic, feeble, his circulation is restored slowly, and he is an invalid for a long length of subsequent time. That is a question of temperament, constitution, antecedents, and so forth.

So with the process of repentance. How you repent, how long you are about it, how far you go, and what speed of progress you make, depends much upon character, will, previous life, even bodily health and strength, and many other considerations.

It is not so much St. Paul's call as St. Paul's character which makes his repentance so remarkable, and perhaps has caused his case to be a source of error to many minds which have not taken his character and temperament and special constitution into account.

For among all the persons who pass across the stage of Scripture history, St. Paul is memorable for a character which was specially his. He has a distinct personality. He is like no one but himself. If you wanted to describe his *speciality* in one word, I know no other word than *thoroughness*. Whatever he did, he did with all his might.

That quality is distinct from impulsiveness. An impulsive man may be impelled or impel himself in more directions than one: he may be swayed to and fro by his feelings, by the winds of any doctrine, or any popular movement; he may be all things at one time or another, and may take up all subjects, and probably excel in none of them.

But St. Paul was one of those men who have rapid intuition, quick judgment, stern determination, and the gift not so much of perseverance as of persistency. His was the mind, not of a judge who carefully balances facts and probabilities and cautiously comes to a conclusion therefrom, but rather of an advocate who takes in the features of a case at a glance, and thenceforward dedicates every energy and every moment to the task of carrying out its interests, regardless of danger, difficulty, and consequence.

When that sort of man repents, he *does* repent, and there is an end of all that can be said of him or it.

There is something very refreshing to one who is weary of the vapid common-places and cowardly compromises of the common herd; there is something more than refreshing in the life and utterances of St. Paul.

He is a tonic. He is mountain-air, and a sea-wind, and an Atlantic tempest in the days when there were no telegrams to take off the edge and the zest of it.

As Saul of Tarsus, he took his line, and worked it out straight and well. The Christians were to him an evil—traitors, seditious, heretics, in his eyes. So he set himself to extirpate them, haling men and women to prison, sparing none, smiting right and left with open eyes and closed hands.

And then came the call—the Voice—the recognition—the fall—the blindness—the collapse—the conversion.

Ordinary men would have recovered themselves slowly, or not at all, after that frightful catastrophe.

Yes, and Saul of Tarsus was no more ; but in his stead, out of his ashes, phoenix-like, sprang, full-winged and in full life and song, another and yet the same.

At once we have Paul, the Saint, repentant, changed, obedient to Baptism, bowed to the yoke, the follower of the Crucified, the friend of the poor and the persecuted, the comrade of martyrs, the teacher of peasant and king, the scorner of the world, the herald of the Kingdom which no man but One as yet had seen.

Only read any one of his letters, and say if his character is not so plain that he who runs may read it.

Why, the very words press and jostle one another in their eagerness to get out of his heart into any other man's heart. Such strange involved sentences as he writes ; he is breathless as they come out of him. He will not wait to order or settle them—one within another, in the wildest confusion, they pour out of him. No confusion of *thought*, though. He always knows what he has to say, and says it in the quickest, readiest fashion. Words are nothing : the truth, whatever it is, is the point with him. Out it must come, and out it does come, headlong, anyhow. There it is at last, and yet scarcely there ; for as we read last week, he finishes a letter with his signature, " Me Paul, so I write," and still something is left, and he puts it down sentence after sentence, one postscript after another, careless of all rule and appearance, careful only that to the uttermost the truth which is in him shall come out of him *thoroughly*.

When a man like that is converted, it is not probable that there will be much turning back. He means going on : and what he means, that he does.

And, now, if you ask me, " What is the moral of Saul's Repentance ? " I don't quite see that it is a fair question.

I think we spoil too many good lives and good stories by moralising about them.

If St. Paul's life and his story cannot quicken a man's pulses, and stir his will, and brace up the muscles of his body and his soul, that man is not to be galvanised into the only life which God knows of by feeble platitudes and pious reflections.

If you cannot read half-a-dozen of St. Paul's letters and then feel that the man who wrote them was in every respect except letter-writing a standard to aim at, and an example which you are only too thankful to follow—and would follow to a hairbreadth, if you had the same stuff in you that he had—then there is no more to be said about him.

But if you do feel that, what comes to you is that you will make the best of your time ; and having been called in some fashion as he was, will just set your shoulder to the wheel, and get out of the ruts and mud of daily sin, and go straight up the hill to the place where Christ is, and where He wants you to be.

I cannot say, of course, when most of us were last called. But I know that we all have been called at one time or another. And I know that some of you are going to be again called this week at your Confirmation-time.

Then, my brethren, think of Saul of Tarsus, and do as he did.

There is no use in religion, if you play with it. But if you take your call, whenever it comes, as meaning a real conversion, a real turning towards God ; and if you see that repentance means continual work—war against sin, and progress in holiness—then, religion will bring you peace.

Then you will know that in religion, as in all things else, he only is the successful man who, in all that he does, is, like Saul, of Tarsus, *thorough*.

An Awakened Sinner's First Prayer

BY REV. ARTHUR ROBERTS, M.A.

"Behold, he prayeth."—Acts ix. 11.

"Behold" is a word of wonder, and men are wont to use it when something strange and remarkable has taken place. It expresses commonly the emotion of a person who sees what is a very unusual sight. Behold! see what a strange thing has happened! And what was the remarkable occurrence here? A sinner humbled in the dust—a sinner pouring out his heart in prayer. Saul had often prayed as the Pharisees did; but never till the hour of his conversion did he pray as an awakened sinner. Then he was a man of another spirit. Instead of the proud and formal carelessness of his unenlightened days, he came in the brokenness of his heart, out of the abundance of his complaint and grief, before his God. He came, not to tell God his merits, but to supplicate God's mercies. He came, not to perform an irksome task, but to relieve a troubled mind. He came in earnest; with his spirit within him—convinced of sin—humbled to the dust—deeply anxious for the salvation of his soul, and seeking that salvation through the merits of the Saviour Whom he had hitherto rejected. Now mark this fact—it cannot be too well impressed upon our minds—God never heard Paul's prayers till he prayed in spirit and in truth. All his pharisee-prayers, however long, however loud, however frequent, went for nothing; but directly his heart prayed, the text was uttered. The God Who had hid His eyes before, now acknowledges that there was a suppliant before His Throne of Grace. "Behold, he prayeth!" Oh! there are two very different ways of coming before God. Most men only *say* their prayers. It is a *bodily* not a *spiritual* exercise—the knee and lip only are employed in it. God does not call this a prayer. He does not say of such a man "Behold, he prayeth!" but "Behold, he triflcth! he mocketh Me—he deceiveth his own soul!" And this, however, warm the language, however spiritual and fluent the petitions. But when the sinner, whose heart aches under a sense of guilt, brings his sad case before his God—anxious to obtain a hearing; athirst for mercy and for pardon, and seeking that pardoning mercy through a Saviour's blood—this is prayer; and as often as that humble contrite sinner renews his supplications—as often as he comes to God for fresh supplies of grace and strength, of light and love, "Behold, he prayeth!" It is what the Lord Himself acknowledges as prayer. The language may be rude and broken; the lips may be unable to express what the heart feels—but still it is prayer. The heart-searching God calls it prayer.

But look again upon my text—does it not teach us something further? Yes; that God notices prayer, gives great heed to it; when, at least, it is such prayer as I have just described. "Behold!" is a word that marks attention, observation. "Behold, he prayeth!" You may infer from hence what an eye God keeps on the awakened sinner—what an attentive ear He gives to such a sinner's prayer. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways." What are the things which draw the greatest share of man's attention? which make him cry, "See here!" or "see there!" Pomp, and show, and earthly grandeur. But turn to God—What is the spectacle an earth, above all others, which His all-seeing eye is pleased to dwell upon? A praying sinner. And what the sound by which His ear is most engaged? The sighing of a contrite heart, and the desire of such as be sorrowful. Many great things were going on upon the earth at the time when Saul was on his knees. And that was to human eye a small,

minute event, a very trifle. Yet how different the Lord's judgment ! He overlooked, in a manner, the concerns of states and kingdoms, and fixed His eye upon that little chamber in Damascus where He saw a sinner praying. And call to mind some other instances of the Lord's attention to the sinner's prayer. Look at the case of Cornelius. That obscure soldier on his knees gained as much notice from the Lord as he would have gained from men had he been the conqueror of the world. "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." Mark again how the Lord speaks of Ephraim's prayer. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols ? I have heard him, and observed him." Yes ; prayer—sincere and fervent prayer—let it come from whom it may, is to the Lord's eye the chief of all events which happen on this earth. The poor humble cottager, crying to Him from some crazy hovel, is an object more important in His sight than events which agitate a kingdom and fill the world with wonder. Come to Him, sinner, with the sacrifice of a contrite spirit, in the all-prevailing name of Jesus, and you may be sure that the Lord of Heaven and earth has His fixed attention drawn to you. His eyes are over you ; His ears are open unto your prayer.

But look at the text, and surely there is something more implied in it than mere attention to a sinner's prayer. We may attend to things we little relish or delight in. But was there not something in the way in which the text was spoken which indicated not only the Lord's notice of a sinner's prayer but the delight He took in it ? Think of the parable of the lost sheep as given us in the 15th chapter of Luke. The shepherd there is represented as recovering the wanderer, laying him on the shoulder, and carrying him home rejoicing. And what does he do *then* ? "He calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me ; for I have found my sheep which was lost." Now in the chapter from which my text comes we find this parable exemplified. Paul was this lost sheep—Jesus the Good Shepherd from Whose fold he was a miserable wanderer. But the Good Shepherd seeks the sheep which He has lost, and finds him. And when that poor sinful man was brought trembling and astonished to Damascus—when the Spirit of grace and supplication was poured into his heart, then the Shepherd might be said to have laid him on His shoulders and to have carried him to His home. And what then, when the Lord went to His servant Ananias and told him what was happening—"Behold, he prayeth" ? Was not this like the Good Shepherd calling His friends and His neighbours together to rejoice with Him ? Surely the Lord's communication of these tidings to His servant Ananias was a token of rejoicing—a proof that He delighted in the prayer which He brought the tidings of. We all know how we feel when anything has happened which gives us great delight—we long to go and tell it to our nearest friend. And surely we are authorized by the parable I have just alluded to, to impute something of the same feeling to our Lord Jesus—yea, even in His glorified Manhood—and to say that there was joy upon those lips which advertised Ananias of the prayer of Paul. Certain it is that "the prayer of the upright is His delight" ; "that joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth" ; that He "will be very gracious to" His praying people "at the voice of their cry" ; and that such sacrifices "come up with acceptance upon His altar." Oh ! if any poor hardened sinner now were to do as Paul did—to cry for mercy from the Saviour he has scorned, there is no question but that that Saviour would not notice merely, but rejoice over him. "Behold, he prayeth !" A glorious event has happened—the son that was dead is alive again—he was lost and is found.

I must call attention again to the text. These are the words not only of a God Who hears prayer and rejoices in it, but of One Who answers prayer, and answers

it very speedily and swiftly. "Behold, he prayeth!" and what may we suppose to have been the subject of that awakened sinner's prayer? We cannot doubt. He prayed to be led into the path of pardon and salvation—to be told what the Lord would have him to do. Well, whilst he is in the very act of offering his prayer, the Lord is in the very act of granting it. Whilst Paul is still upon his knees begging light and direction from above, the Lord is answering his prayer by sending Ananias to direct and comfort him. And here then is one memorable instance of the fulfilment of that precious promise, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." That is a promise which is very generally applicable. Let any sinner now seek grace and guidance, as St. Paul did on the day of his conversion, and, behold, God's answer to that prayer is at the door. The Lord is waiting to be gracious. He is ready to prevent you with the blessings of goodness. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

But again, let us learn another lesson from the text—that it is the mark of a real Christian to feel a tender interest in the conversion of a soul to God—yes, and in the earliest symptoms of that blessed change. It was to Ananias, a faithful servant and disciple, that the Lord announced the tidings in my text, "Behold, he prayeth!" And what does this imply, but that Ananias would rejoice in the intelligence—that he would share in his Lord's joy at the conversion of so great a sinner? "Behold, he prayeth!" as much as to intimate, "Here is news that will delight your ears—in which you will feel a lively interest and satisfaction. There is a sinner praying; a fresh soul is being added to My flock." Yes, if a man's own heart be right with God, there will be no happier news for him to hear than that other hearts are being touched and softened. To hear of some hardened sinner that "Behold, he prayeth"—prayeth in sincerity and truth will be sweet music in such a person's ears: words that will fill his heart with gladness, and his lips with praise. How glad was good Barnabas when he saw "the grace of God" at Antioch! How did Paul rejoice over Onesimus, and John over the children of that elect lady! You that profess godliness, have you this mark? Can you rejoice with your Good Shepherd over a returning sheep? Can you enter into such a feeling as dictated the words, "Behold he prayeth"?

But it was not only to refresh the heart of Ananias that the Lord communicated to him these happy tidings. The intelligence "behold, he prayeth!" was followed immediately by a call on Ananias to water what the Lord had planted. "He prayeth," and therefore there is a call upon your charity—there is an opportunity, an occasion, a demand, for your offices of Christian love. Learn then, Christian brethren, that as soon as any ungodly neighbour shows any symptoms of a softened heart, as soon as it can be said of him that "behold he prayeth!" you have duties, urgent duties, to fulfil towards him. You must hold out to him the hand of fellowship; you must endeavour, as ability and opportunity are given you, to strengthen him in the Lord. It is your part to comfort and encourage him; to speak to him of Jesus; to recommend his case to God; and especially to see to it that you put no stumbling-block, no occasion of falling in your weak brother's way.

Prayer as a Form of Self-Realisation

BY REV. F. A. RUSSELL.

"Behold, he prayeth."—*Acts ix. 11.*

A great writer on the origin and development of monotheism in Israel has noted the genius of the Hebrew for religion. That is manifest in many instances

of vision and inspiration, of thought and speech ; but it is nowhere more manifest than in the incident before us, where Saul is presented as touching the very summit of his experience through prayer. The brilliant young Rabbi of the synagogue has transcended himself in an act of adoration. That is the impression conveyed by the text which I ask you to consider. It shows us prayer as the source of human individuality, the secret of human power.

1. First, there is the prayer of custom, among men and women. Their fathers have prayed, and so they pray, as by hereditary instinct. But how little it means to them ! There is a formal recognition of God, which opens the day and ends it, and which means so little either to God or us, that it can only be described as the trick of an automaton. A praying wheel in a man's hand can hardly be much more futile than a praying wheel in a man's head ! Denude prayer of thought, will, and love, and what remains is only a choice between spiritual narcotics. How many prayers, whether individual or collective, come under that heading ! There are people who would not dream of sitting down to a meal without asking a blessing, but yet, immediately after doing so, they abuse the food. What a farce it is ! If you feel it necessary to recognise the Giver, why look askance at the gift ? The one act cancels the other.

Do not imagine, however, that I am condemning all formal prayer. At any moment a breath of sincerity redeems it, and even the barest concession to the existence of things unseen and eternal may suddenly become dynamic in a crisis of the soul, when, stirred or stricken to its depths, it demands an abiding reality. There is probably no partially civilised people so full of individuality as the Mahometans. They have a dignity, a force, an element of unconquerableness beyond all other races ; and I think these results follow from their fine habit of daily prayer. Morning and evening every reverent Mahometan is upon his knees, testifying to the one true God, and Mahomet His prophet. The habit has infused iron into the blood of the people ! There is a blessing in all reverent prayer, however formal ; would that it might everywhere become the prayer of emotion and intelligence !

2. Sometimes we pray from fear. We realise the perplexities of our lives ; we remember their remissness and their evil, and in the hope of averting the result of all these, we lift to God eager, if not holy, hands of prayer. It is a pathetic exercise ! We forget that the world is governed upon the principle outlined in the words : " Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God is too loyal to His own purposes and to men to leave us in a world unregulated by the majesty of law. Every form of wrong-doing receives its inevitable reward. God is about us as a consuming fire, cleansing away our evil. People often ignore this fact when they pray. They fancy that if only they make amends upon their lips, they may act as they choose. But it is an illusion ; God loves us too well for that ! His " eternal thought " of us withstands the pleadings of our terror and our injustice. They fruitlessly assail the air !

3. There is a prayer of greed, in which we have no wish to honour God, only to use Him. He represents little more to us than does the Obi-man, the native wonder-worker, to the savage. He is the God of our superstition, and prayer is the talismanic utterance by which we try to make Him our tool. We have a vague belief in its magic efficacy, whether our end be triumph over a national enemy, or over a personal rival, or the gratification of some egotistic craving. The Fatherhood of God only means to us the possible bounty of God, and when that is denied in the form which we covet, we curse and doubt Him. We never pause and wonder what *we* can give to God ; and so our prayer degenerates into the basest kind of mendicancy.

4. The belief in the living God is the belief in a God Who is Soul of our soul and Spirit of our spirit. That belief is the ground of prayer. But the prayer which it inspires is no prayer of mere custom, or cowardice, or greed. It is the finite, consciously touching the infinite, aspiration seeking for its ground, inconsistency realising its judgment, limitation learning the wide and beneficent sweep of love. That is Christian prayer, the communion with God of which we sing in the hymn that it is "the Christian's native air." It is the atmosphere in which we realise our being. We cease to despise ourselves, knowing that the true gauge of our poor human life is God. That teaches us not only infinite humility, but the dignity that casts out alike arrogance and despair.

It casts out arrogance. The prayerlessness of many lives is revealed in their vulgar, untutored egotism. They may have been successful in business, successful in a profession, successful in literature; but whatever they have achieved, their self-complacency and conceit prove that they nourish a blind life within the brain. They do not pray! How indescribably they suffer!

We hardly comprehend the sin of arrogance, or how deeply the soul in its grip is to be pitied. It robs us both of Heaven above and of the sympathy of men and women around us. But no one can be arrogant, no one can be consciously excellent, in the presence of God. The most industrious, the most successful, here feels that he has but cumbered the ground. We none of us live at the top of our powers. We all do less than we ought to do! And this is indescribably felt by us when we are alone to the Alone. We arise from that dear communion with ashen lips and failing hearts. But we stoop to conquer; we judge, that we may command ourselves.

Thus prayer is the opportunity of the strong. But it is also the tonic of the weak. It saves us from self-pity and from despair. For it is in our approach to the infinite patience of God that we learn the patience with ourselves that is not apathy, but the very soul of effort. Perhaps self-pity is a sin as deplorable as arrogance. In both, we drift away from God, away from duty and away from worth. Morbid despondency is one of the worst moods in which we can indulge, yet there are times when we positively revel in it. We blame fate, or environment with a kind of inverted enthusiasm, we even seem to find a malign pleasure in self-accusation—the fact being that we would really rather torture ourselves incessantly than for a single moment forget ourselves! Nobody can succour us in that mood, and nothing can redeem us, save the consciousness that for all our bitter failure, our wasted opportunities and ruined powers, God is still our refuge and our strength. That consciousness is our salvation. When we pray, we rise through humility and repentance into better and braver lives, lives that make God more real to men. Hooker says that "So much of our lives is celestial and divine as we spend in the exercise of prayer." And he means that nothing else will bring life into its true perspective. It is a fact writ large in history, and reiterated on every page of experience, that spiritual waste is mental, and even practical impoverishment. Sometimes, indeed, men's prayers may seem to be at variance with their conduct. But that is only their spoken prayers. The prayer of a man's inmost soul strikes the keynote of his whole life.

But there is more in life than its outward conduct. The realisation of God in prayer chastises arrogance, redeems despair, and purifies action. But it also interprets and deepens the inspiration of love. To love themselves and to love their fellows, after the fashion of the love of God—that is the highest work of men and women. Not only themselves, but their fellows, not only their fellows, but themselves, since all are of God, and in God! That is the spirit of which all true humanitarianism is born.

The Conversion of St. Paul

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"Behold, he prayeth."—Acts ix. 11.

The narrative is introduced in contrast with a different spirit and a different journey. Philip had been sent on a commission, not from the Sanhedrin, but from God Himself; not to persecute Christ's people, but to add to them; not to carry chains and death, but to convey peace and joy into a burdened and benighted heart.

"But Saul," unlike him, "still breathing of threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, came to the high priest, and asked from him letters to Damascus to the synagogues," addressed to the officers of the various Jewish synagogues in Damascus, "that if he found any persons to be of the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

The state of Saul's mind at the outset of this journey is described in very strong terms. He was "still breathing of threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." His every breath was menace and murder. To such lengths may prejudice and self-opinion carry even a conscientious man!

The object of his journey was to discover any persons belonging to "the way." This is an expression often met with in the Acts. Sometimes it is called "the way of salvation"; sometimes "the way of the Lord"; sometimes "the way of God"; sometimes, as here, more briefly, "the way." True religion, it reminds us, is not idleness, but exertion; not sitting still, but going forwards. We are all on our way some whither; and in that way we have a Master, a Guide, a Leader, under Whose care and protection we shall find salvation, we shall find rest and a home at the last.

"And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he was drawing near to Damascus," on the 5th or 6th day perhaps of his journey, "and suddenly there shone around him a light out of the heaven."

In one of his own later narratives of the event he says that it was "at mid-day" that this light gleamed upon him; and that it was distinguishable even from the blaze of an Eastern noon; it was "above the brightness of the sun." His attention was to be arrested, and the Creator of light and of the sun knew how to do this effectually.

"And he fell upon the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" We are told, in his own fuller narrative, that the voice spake to him "in the Hebrew tongue." It was no mere fancy: the words were distinctly audible; they were the words of a known language; and they asked a question with reference to the errand on which he had come. "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou Me?" He is known by name in Heaven. His life is open there. His commission, his purpose in this journey, every secret of his heart, is read above; and he is asked *why* he thus persecutes Him Who suffers with and suffers in every affliction of His people. How strange, how mysterious a question! A man whose whole life is given to treading out this spark of what he deems fatal error, this catching and spreading flame of a (to him) falsely so called Gospel, is asked from Heaven what he is doing and why: what has this Person Who speaks done that He should be thus hated, thus opposed, thus injured?

"And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, Whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee"—so the A.V. proceeds, though probably this clause is inserted from the fuller narrative in the 26th chapter—"to kick against

the goads." He Who often spake in parables below, speaks still in proverbs above. It is hard for thee, it is a folly and a cruelty to thyself, thus to kick against the goad that drives thee : it can but make the iron enter more deeply into thy flesh ; it can but increase the pain of thy pursuit and of thy capture.

Again a clause follows in our A.V., drawn, in substance, from the fuller narrative of the 22nd chapter, where, if life be spared, we shall meet it hereafter. The shorter text here stands thus, without interruption : " I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest : but rise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Space must be given for conviction to have its perfect work, before the new life could profitably begin, or the new trust be safely undertaken. We are always for precipitation : when a new idea presents itself, we rush, fit or unfit, to act upon it : but God is a God of patience : He proceeds calmly and therefore surely to His ends : " in due time " is written upon all His works, and therefore none has to be recalled or done again. " Enter into the city, and there, in due time, it shall be told thee what thou must do."

" And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no one." In St. Paul's own narratives of the event, in the 22nd and 26th chapters, he says, " " When we were all fallen to the earth " ; and again, " They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me." These varieties, for contradictions they are not, prove one thing ; that the descriptions of the sacred writers are free and independent : they have one great mark of truth upon them, that they are not studied and servile ; they do not echo each other's words, they tell each its own story ; there is none of that elaborate guarding and fencing of expressions, none of that careful reconciliation of statement with statement, which every court of justice regards with strong suspicion as a sure indication of design and falsehood. Easy would it have been for St. Luke, the writer of this history, to compare the 9th chapter with the 22nd and with the 26th, and to bring the three into a rigid, verbal consistency. That he did not do so is a proof of his veracity, of his single-mindedness, of his confidence in the force of truth. We can all reconcile for ourselves : it is a waste of time to dwell upon the probable suppositions, that (1) they who first fell afterwards stood, or they who first stood (that is, stopped their journey) then fell terrified to the earth : or again (2), that those who heard the sound of a voice did not hear the words spoken, and that those who saw the light yet saw no one, no person—the form of the Speaker was visible to Saul, and to him only. These are the mere easiesses of a popular narrative. The Word of God is not so unstable as to dread exposure from varieties which rather turn to it for a testimony.

" And Saul arose (or, was raised) from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing " : " blinded with excess of light." he sought in vain to distinguish objects : " but leading him by the hand they brought him into Damascus. And he was for three days without sight, and ate not nor drank."

Who can imagine the thoughts of remorse and anguish which filled his mind during those days of darkness ? A whole lifetime must have been lived again : every opinion, every principle, every feeling, had to be reviewed and reversed : that which he had loved, now he hated ; and that which had been highly esteemed was now becoming an abomination. Did not the figure of the dying Stephen now haunt his memory ? What would he now have given for the counsel and comfort of him whom he had helped to murder ? But it is vain to enlarge upon these topics : the silence of Scripture is more eloquent than man's words, and we can but ponder in our hearts that brief yet most expressive saying, " He was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

God sees, my brethren, what man is so slow to see, the value of a season of spiritual suffering, to those more especially whom He destines for a high place in His ministry and in His glory. All the greatest lights of His Church in all ages have had such a kindling. Without this, it is scarcely possible for some colours of beauty and holiness to be burnt into the character. If anyone here present is in trouble of this kind; walking in doubt and darkness, and seeing no light; I would counsel him already to give God thanks for it: whatever it be, however much or however justly you may blame yourself as the cause of it, yet so far it is suffering, know you certainly that it is God's visitation: bear it meekly, as the punishment of sin; bear it bravely, as the sign of discipline: and out of it, in His own time and way, God, if you look to Him and faint not, will surely, will infallibly work out good. Let us hear how it was with him whose wonderful conversion is before us.

"Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus, by name Ananias." We know not how he came there; whether he was one of the converts of Pentecost, or one scattered on the persecution that arose about Stephen: this only we know, that he was placed there by God's Providence, "Which ordereth all things both in Heaven and earth," to be ready for that blessed and honoured office now to be entrusted to him, as the Evangelist and the Baptist of the great Apostle St. Paul. "And the Lord," Jesus Christ Himself, "said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, it is I, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight"—Christ knows the very names of our streets; yes, and the very house in which each one dwells—there is a sanctity therefore in human habitations, however humble, if the Lord vouchsafes to notice and to name from Heaven—"and seek, in the house of Judas"—how would it startle us to hear Christ name the master of one of our houses, and specify the penitent or the saint who dwells therein!—one "Saul by name, of Tarsus." I know no verse in Holy Scripture more pregnant with solemn and comforting truths than this. There is still to be seen in that ancient city of Damascus, so travellers say, just such a street, perhaps the very street here spoken of; a long straight street, running from the gate at which Saul probably entered, till the eye loses it in the distance: and here Jesus Christ names that street; names it from Heaven; speaks of a particular house in it, just as insignificant, probably, as one of our own humble dwellings; calls the house by its master's name, and describes not only the name but the country of the stranger who was lying, blind and miserable, within its door. Surely He Who thus spake then, and Who is "the same yesterday and to-day and for ever," has His eye and His ear still open towards us, marks our words and our deeds in the privacy of our dwellings, and could at any moment, if it so pleased Him, interpose in our lives with an authority which would constrain conviction. If He does not; if we, more than ever, are to "walk" now "by faith not by sight," at least, God helping us, let us not walk with Him by neither, neither by faith nor by sight! O let us treasure that which we know of Him, and behave towards Him, in our daily conversation, according to that which we say of Him in our worship!

Seek out in the house of Judas—such is the command—one called Saul, of Tarsus; "for, behold, he prayeth, and saw a man, Ananias by name, to have come in, and placed a hand upon him, that he might recover sight." Thus to-day again, as before in the case of the Ethiopian convert, we mark the double preparation for the communication and for the reception of truth. Saul sees in a vision the man who is to minister to him; and the messenger is shown in a vision the work to which he is called. But there is an obstacle to be overcome.

"But Ananias answered, Lord, I heard from many persons about this man,

how many evils he did to Thy saints in Jerusalem : and hither he hath authority " —he has a commission to this city—" from the chief priests, to bind all that call on Thy name." A Christian is briefly characterized as " one who calls on," who invokes, who calls in to his aid, " the name of Christ " ; that is, Christ in His revealed character, as the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners. Will that, my friends, describe our life ? that it is a constant calling in of Jesus Christ to our help, and to our guidance, and to our protection, and to our consolation ?

" But the Lord said to him, Go ; for this man is to Me a vessel of selection," a chosen implement, " for the purpose of bearing My name," of carrying the revelation of Me, " in the presence of both Gentiles and kings, and sons of Israel " ; in the presence that is of both classes of mankind, Gentiles with their rulers, as well as Israelites : " for I will indicate to him," I will give him as it were a hint or glimpse of what is before him, enough at least to make him understand the nature of his mission, " how many things he must suffer in behalf of My name," of Me as revealed for the life and healing of the nations.

" And Ananias went forth, and entered into the house ; and after placing upon him his hands, said, Saul, my brother, the Lord hath sent me—Jesus, Who appeared to thee in the way by which thou camest—that thou mightest recover sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell off from his eyes as it were scales, and he recovered his sight, and arose, and was baptized."

The three words of the text will tell us what must be the first fruits of this new conviction. " Behold, he prayeth ! " So spake the Lord to Ananias of him whom He was beginning to accredit as a chosen instrument. " Behold, he prayeth ! " Had Saul of Tarsus never bent his knees in prayer before ? Could he say, if this were so, that he had " lived in all good conscience before God " from his youth up ? Had he never prayed seriously, earnestly, devoutly ? Had he not prayed that morning when he went to the chief priests for his commission to persecute Christ's people ? Had he not prayed during the days of his journey ? on that memorable last day of his journey, when he drew near Damascus ? Yes, my brethren : we do not read here any denial of it. But there were two or three points of difference between this and any prayer which he had before uttered.

First of all, it was the first prayer he had ever breathed with a knowledge of " the plague of his own heart." It was the first time that he had seen himself as God saw him ; as poor and destitute and miserable and blind : as a man needing a Sacrifice for his sins, a Mediator to intercede for him with God, and a Divine Spirit to make his heart His temple. It was the first time that he had ever prayed as a penitent ; as a man to whom all the past is but as a heap of worthless rags ; as a man whose whole fabric of self-righteousness has toppled down, and who desires henceforth to be nothing, and to have nothing, and to do nothing, but from God and with God and in God. " I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth Thee : wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It was the first time—more than all else—that his prayer had ever made any mention, save in scorn and contempt, of that holy name in which alone a sinner can approach God. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ as necessary to salvation, as a Divine Person " Whom truly to know is eternal life," now first had place in his supplications. Doubtless with many bitter tears and many contrite confessions did he now bewail his past treatment of Jesus. Now his one cry was for that all-merciful Saviour to become his Propitiation and his Righteousness ; the Guide of his way, and the hope of his end. And therefore, if for no other reason, it could now be said of him, as never before, " Behold, he prayeth ! "

How will our prayers bear these tests ? Are they the prayers of the humble and the self-accusing ? Are they the prayers of one hungering and thirsting

after a righteousness not of man but of God? Are they the prayers of one who knows but of one only name under Heaven, given among men, whereby he can be saved? Try yourself by these tests, and God give us no rest until by His grace it can at last be said of us, in these senses, in Heaven above, "Behold, he prayeth!"

The Vessel Chosen and Charged

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way," &c.—Acts ix. 15.

We shall best explain and apply the text by examining its terms in succession, one by one.

1. "A vessel."—The term signifies the implement by which any work is done, or the dish in which anything is held. It is an instrument constructed and fitted for use in any species of operation.

All the world is the field whereon God works, and it is full of the instruments which He employs. Every flower, every leaf, every tendril is a cunningly contrived instrument, designed and fitted for carrying on some delicate process in the vegetable economy. In animals, every member of the body is a tool with which the creature—with which the great Creator works. The eye, the ear, the tongue, the foot, and a thousand other exquisite instruments, hang at hand in the workshop, ready for the worker's use.

Each separate part of creation, again, is an instrument in God's hands for carrying His plans into effect. The internal fires of the globe are His instruments for heaving up the mountain ridges, and causing the intervening valleys to subside. The clouds are vessels employed in carrying water from its great reservoir in the ocean to every portion of the thirsty land. The rivers are waste-pipes for carrying back the soiled water that it may be purified for subsequent use. The sun is an instrument for lighting and warming a troop of revolving worlds; and the earth's huge bulk a curtain for screening off the sunlight at stated intervals, and so affording to weary workers a grateful night of rest. Chief of all the implements provided and employed on earth is man—made last, made best for his Author's service; broken, disfigured, and defiled by sin, but capable of working wondrously yet, when redeemed, and restored, and employed again.

God has not cast away the best of all His instruments because it was marred and polluted. He has conceived and executed a costly plan for redeeming and renewing it. He spared not His own Son, that He might have from this fallen family a multitude of vessels full of His love—a multitude of fitting instruments employed in His service. A soul won is the best instrument for winning souls.

2. "A chosen vessel."—This man, who was raised from the ground by his companions and led blind into Damascus, is the vessel whom the Lord has sovereignly chosen, and will graciously employ.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place." "Known unto God are all His works." Compassing him about in all his ways, God felt every throb of impotent anger that was beating in the persecutor's heart. Although the vessel was marred and occupied with evil, its Maker counted it still His own. He can employ the evil as His unconscious instruments, or make them willing in the day of His power. When He had chastised backsliding Israel by the King of Babylon, He broke the rod and threw it away. In other cases He turns the king's heart as a river of water, and then accepts the willing homage of a converted man.

It was a polished and capacious vessel that the Great King wrenched from the

hands of the arch-enemy near the gate of Damascus. One of the clearest intellects that ever glowed in a human frame changed hands that day. Saul was a man of rare courage. He was a good soldier of the wicked one before he owned allegiance to Christ. He did what he said. The purposes which his heart devised his hand executed. "I verily thought I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did." The vessel was capacious, and the capacious vessel was full. All the learning of the time had been poured into it. The traditions of the Jews and the philosophy of the Greeks lay and seethed together in that roomy and restless brain. Not only was his head full of notions; his heart was fired with a resolute purpose, and his arm was nerved by a dauntless will. He was Christ's chief enemy then in the world. He breathed forth threatening and slaughter against the members of the Church, blasphemies against its living Head. God looks down from Heaven on this man, not as an adversary whose assaults are formidable, but as an instrument which may be turned to another use. As clay in the hands of the potter this man lies. The vessel may be broken in anger, or employed in labours of love, as the Maker wills. Arrested at the crisis of its course by a hand unseen, it is turned upside down, emptied of its accumulated filth, purged from all its dross, filled from Heaven's pure treasures, and used to water the world with the word of life. Under God's eye and in God's hand, this man is not a formidable antagonist, but simply a vessel to be broken in judgment, or purified for use on earth and in Heaven.

Saul of Tarsus, called to be an Apostle, is a conspicuous example of Divine sovereignty. He did not first choose Christ, but Christ chose him. He was in the way of evil when the Lord met him with subduing, forgiving, renewing mercy. When human pride is at last silenced by the sense of redeeming love, it is sweet to feel and own that Jesus is at once the Author and the Finisher of our faith—"the beginning of the creation of God" within renewed human hearts on earth, and the ending thereof when the spirits of the just are made perfect in His presence. Christ is first and last—all in all.

3. "A vessel *unto Me*."—Two things lie in the conversion of Paul and in every conversion: the man gets an Almighty Saviour, and God gets a willing servant. The true instinct of the new creature burst forth from Paul's breast as soon as he knew his Saviour, and before he was lifted from the ground—"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The answer, sent through Ananias in Damascus, after the tumult had subsided, indicated to the convert what he should be, rather than what he should do: "He is a chosen vessel unto Me." We get a glimpse here of the two tendencies, the human and the Divine. I shall do, says the disciple in the ardour of a first love; Thou shalt be, answers that wise and kind Master, Who knows that the spirit in the disciple is willing, but the flesh weak. To be like Christ is the most effectual way of working for Christ. I shall *bear* the vessels of the Lord, volunteers the ransomed sinner, when he feels that he is not his own, but bought with a price; the reply to this offer requires a less positive, more passive, and yet greater thing: Thou shalt *be* the vessel of the Lord. It is a great thing that I should take up instruments, and do a work for Christ in the world; but it is a greater that Christ should take me in His hand, and work out His purposes with me.

4. "A vessel to *bear My name*."—The text tells not only what he is and whose he is, but also and specifically to what uses he will be applied. He was a vessel firmly put together, and filled to overflowing, before Jesus met him in the way. At that meeting he was emptied of his miscellaneous vanities, and filled with the name of Christ. See an account of the whole process by his own pen: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:"

&c. (Phil. iii. 4-8). The whole stock-in-trade of the self-righteous Pharisee is inventoried here. Himself delights to display the filthy rags, and make a show of them openly. He appropriates the shame to himself, that the glory may rise to his Lord. He recounts how these were cast out at the great change, and counted no longer gain, but loss. When these are cast out, however, he does not remain empty. No man ever yet did cast out his own self-righteousness from mere dislike of it. As the money-changers were driven from the Temple only at and by the entrance of Jesus, so the false confidences maintain their ground in a human heart until they are displaced by the presence of the Lord our Righteousness. All these carefully gathered, tenderly cherished stores, he now counts loss; but it is for Christ. He counted them precious as long as he knew none other. He never proposed to sell off all that he had, or anything that he had, until he fell in with the pearl of great price. The old adage is true in fact although defective in philosophy: Nature abhors a vacuum; and in nature, whether its material or spiritual department, a vacuum is never found. Each man is full either of his own things or of Christ's.

The name of Christ is the precious thing wherewith the vessel is charged. So full was Paul of this treasure, that he determined in his ministry to know none other. Whether the Apostle be considered for the moment a vessel for bearing seed, or one for bearing water, the result is the same. It is of the things of Christ that the ministering Spirit takes and gives to the disciples, that they may drop the seed into broken hearts, or offer cold water to thirsty souls. There is none other name given under Heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

5. "To bear My name *before Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel.*"—The name of Christ is the treasure which the vessel bears; to the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel the vessel bears it. This bread of life, like the manna which fell in the wilderness, is given to be used, not to be hoarded. To be ever getting, ever giving, is the only way of keeping both the vessel and its treasure sweet. The more you give to others, the more you enjoy for your own use.

Certain classes are enumerated before whom Paul should be a witness for Christ. Before, or, more literally, "in the face of" these, this vessel must bear that precious name. The form of the expression indicates that in this ministry self-denying courage is required. Perhaps the series, in this respect, constitutes a climax. It is easier to speak of Christ and His salvation to the Gentiles than to kings, and easier to speak of Him to kings than to His own chosen people. Israel's enmity against the Lord's Anointed was keener than that of the surrounding nations. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not; but to some, even of these, He gave power to become the sons of God. Paul himself was one of the first-fruits of the seed of Abraham, and a harvest has been gathered since. To this day, however, the nation in its main bulk remains more obstinate than the heathen in refusing to have this Man to reign over them.

In our day, too, there are various classes and characters of men who need the testimony of Jesus. Those who possess it should be prepared to bear it about in every place, and hold it forth in any company. This witness in his day was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; would that all our Christianity were as honest and as strong! If we quail where the majority profess to be on our side, what would have become of us if our lot had been cast in the beginning of the Gospel, when its disciples were obliged to confront an adverse world?

But, perhaps, we should not speak of more courage being required to maintain a good confession in one place, and less in another; for with God it is as easy to keep the ocean within its bed, as to balance a dew-drop on a blade of grass; and the same principle rules in the distribution of grace to disciples of Christ. With-

out it, the strongest is not sufficient for anything ; with it, the feeblest is sufficient for all. Our martyr forefathers, who, by the peace of God ruling in their hearts, were enabled to make a good confession at the stake, would, if left to themselves, have denied their Lord under the blandishments of a godless drawing-room. To the eye of sense, the faithfulness of this generation is not tested by so severe a strain ; but the difference lies mainly in the outward appearance. The human heart is still as deceitful, and the god of this world still as powerful, as in the days of old. In our own strength we cannot overcome the least temptation ; through Christ that strengtheneth us we can conquer the greatest.

The Conversion of St. Paul

BY VERY REV. CHARLES MERIVALE, D.D.

"Go thy way : for he is a chosen vessel unto Me," &c.—Acts ix. 15.

The history of the conversion of St. Paul is the only complete history of a conversion which the Scriptures record. We are possessed of an account of the individual before his conversion, sufficiently minute to give us considerable insight into his character and state of mind ; we have a particular account of the fact which caused his conversion ; we have various hints of the process by which the first sudden impression was ripened into knowledge, conviction, and faith ; and finally we have a complete detail of the actions by which he manifested that faith afterwards, and, in the Epistles particularly, most important materials for ascertaining the temper of mind which that faith imparted to him. If we compare the account of the conversion of Cornelius, or of the eunuch of Queen Candace, or of any other such conversion mentioned in the New Testament, we shall see directly how far it falls short in completeness of that of St. Paul. These former are recorded as historical facts, and the consideration of them may have moreover its moral uses : but it is the history of St. Paul alone that can give us any clue to the solution of that most important question, what namely are the principles upon which the Divine Being proceeds when He resolves to turn a vessel of wrath into a vessel of mercy. The account of the conversion of this Apostle, with all that preceded and followed it, does indeed stand out in so marked a way upon the surface of the Scripture History, that it seems impossible to suppose that it is not intended to serve a far deeper purpose than that of merely recording an historical event.

Before I proceed to the consideration of the character of St. Paul, as it appears before his conversion, and the extent to which, with all its imperfections, it might serve as the natural basis of the spiritual and Christian temper which he afterwards manifested, let us notice what is, I believe, the only presumption alleged in favour of the notion that the greatest sinner is ordinarily converted into the greatest saint. It is urged, I imagine, that so surprising and complete a change argues more for the power of God ; that so extraordinary an event distinctly proves its author to be divine ; that it has in short all the effect of a miracle performed before our eyes. Now what is the argument in favour of the credibility of the actual miracles recorded in Scripture ? is it not, that they are all performed with a reasonable and beneficent purpose ; a purpose which approves itself to the unbiassed intellect which our Maker has given us ? Would mankind have believed in these miracles had their object run counter to our common moral sense of what is just and fitting ? Our highest human authorities assure us, by no abstract reasoning, but from the records of experience, that they would not. Then the

naked question which remains is this : Does the presumed fact of God's preferring the worst sinners to take, upon adequate repentance, into His greatest favour, approve itself generally to human sense as reasonable and beneficent ? Would the wisdom and mercy of such a miraculous dealing strike mankind with the irresistible conviction of its divinity ? It is not necessary, you will observe, for me to answer this question. But any one who does proceed to use this argument as presumptive evidence in favour of any such view of the Divine dealings must be prepared to answer it decidedly in the affirmative.

There have been, no doubt, very conspicuous instances of men of reprobate lives being converted to the performance of good and holy works through the influence of the Faith awakened within them, and being to all outward appearance received into favour with the Deity. But it may be reasonably doubted, upon the testimony of all human experience, whether such persons ever do recover the perfect holiness and purity and simplicity, as of little children, to which alone is attached the promise of everlasting life. It was indeed a hard saying of our Lord's, but there it stands recorded, and we must not shrink from it : " Verily I say unto you, unless ye become as one of these little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The most favourable meaning that we can venture to attach to these words is, that there will always be a vast difference in the favour with which God regards those who pass through life in a state of innocence and simplicity, and those who having fallen away from it, having eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, having tasted of the pleasures of sin, having contracted the pollutions of vice, or the callousness of unbelief, and again repented, try indeed henceforth to conduct themselves as Christians ought, but can never again return to the state from which they have fallen, can never unlearn the worldly knowledge they have acquired, can never forget the images which have been presented to their eyes, can never do good again for its own sake, even as a little child, in perfect love, without any alloy of the consciousness of fear.

For observe what human experience teaches us as to the consequences of having yielded to sin in the two ways in which God's mercy seems to have been most conspicuous in recalling and converting men. It is not uncommon to see persons, who at one period of their lives have fallen very deeply into gross sensual sins, restored eventually to a full sense of the enormity of the course they have been pursuing, rendered truly penitent, and most anxious to do all in their power to recover their early temper of mind, when they walked innocently before God and knew no sin. To such persons the assurance of God has been most strongly conveyed that He will hide their sins and blot out their iniquities : He sends to them the grace of His Holy Spirit to comfort them under the afflictions which bow them down, to raise up them that are fallen, and to endow them with the fullest spiritual strength to bring forth works meet for repentance. But what right have we to imagine that He sympathizes with the difficulties men find in recovering from their fallen state : that He is the more indulgent to their efforts to break through the temptations which they have wound round themselves by their own act and deed ? What right have we to suppose that He looks with more favour upon a man who wrestles manfully against enemies with whom he had no business to have any dealings at all, than upon one who in his state of innocence and simplicity serves his God cheerfully from first to last without a struggle ? There is nothing in the moral economy of nature to bear us out in any such supposition. The habitual practice of sensual vice is found to leave traces of itself in the soul of a man (I am not now speaking of his body), which are never perhaps wholly eradicated. A man may have renounced his sin, and feel deeply sensible of its enormity, and continue for years free from any repetition of it. But is he ever

so secure from falling into temptation as one who had never been seduced? Who would in the practical affairs of life trust the reformed drunkard, for instance, as implicitly as the man who up to mature age had never been guilty of transgression? The reason is obvious: we know practically that habitual acts of sin proceed from a gradual relaxation of the moral principles in which we have been brought up. It is by thinking and brooding over our temptations, by imagining extreme cases, by extenuating particular instances of guilt, by tempting ourselves to slide into that most insidious of fallacies, that what admits of excuse or palliation under extreme circumstances cannot be very wrong under any—it is by reasoning such as this, which is certain to creep upon any one who once opens the door to it—that a man's virtue is undermined, and he is precipitated into every enormity. I believe that to have once admitted the idea of the indifference of human actions in God's sight, is to have imbibed a poison which may never perhaps be wholly eradicated; which no man at least can ever feel confident of having eradicated; and which least of all can he expect the world to feel confident has been the case with him.

The other class of sins to which I alluded as being such as have often admitted of very remarkable conversions, are sins of Infidelity, that is, hardness of heart and irreverence in spiritual things. In this case as in the other, conversion is far from implying a complete recovery and restoration to a previous temper of mind. The unbeliever acquires habits of thought while in his state of unbelief, of the continuance of which he is perhaps almost unconscious, after having formally renounced the errors which were founded upon them, but which may still continue to exercise a very pernicious influence upon him, and thwart the intentions of God in his favour. The deceitful notion of the irresponsibility of man to God for his opinions; of the indifference of the forms of belief, and consequently of belief itself; this is a notion, which while it perhaps always accompanies unbelief, is by no means always eradicated by conversion. A man may have oscillated for a time between Christianity and Infidelity, and finally determined in favour of the former, but still retain the careless and indifferent temper which made him a sceptic in the first instance. In short to recover Belief, and to recover the strong and healthy tone of belief which results from a full and fixed conviction of its moral importance, are different things, and require distinct efforts to accomplish: and a person who has indulged himself in the immoral and irreverent temper, out of which unbelief generally springs, may often be restored to the possession of a formal faith, without any of those spiritual feelings with which it should be legitimately associated.

We shall all readily acknowledge, however, that the sins of St. Paul, those for which he, in the fulness of his remorse and self-abasement, characterized himself as "the chief of sinners," did not partake of the nature of either of these two classes. There is no reason whatever to suppose that he had fallen into sensual vice. On the contrary, he professed to have been brought up in the strictest school of the Pharisees, and to have conformed to its most austere moral precepts; to have been "as touching the righteousness which is in the Law blameless." Nor, again, was he at any period what can fairly be termed an unbeliever. If he disbelieved in Christ's revelation, he did it, as he himself says, in ignorance, Saul was ever faithful, according to his notion of "the way of the Lord"; and at a late period of his life he could justly say that he "had lived in all good conscience before God until this day." He had studied the religious tenets of the Pharisees with zeal; he had embraced them as a matter of duty and conscience: the violence and blindness of heart which made him overlook the evidence of Christ's religion, and do such grievous wrong to its professors, was the result of serious

inquiry into what he thought, and was encouraged by his instructors to think, was a religious duty. He "verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"; and he who spent so many years in communing with himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit after his conversion, before he ventured to come forth and preach the Gospel publicly, assuredly did not take up the notion, that he verily ought to persecute the Church of Christ, lightly or without deliberation. It is not, however, to be supposed for a moment, that any degree of seriousness, or amount of deliberation tending to such a result, could render the persecution of Christ's followers other than grievous sin. Had Saul searched the Scriptures, rather than the traditions of men, he would have recognized the promised Saviour in Jesus, as Simeon and Anna did. Again, the violent and even blood-thirsty spirit which he manifested, consenting to the martyrdom of Stephen, and dragging the Christians from their houses to prison, and before the Sanhedrin, was a direct violation of the law of mercy, by which he vainly fancied he was guided, not seeing that, in attaching himself to the strictest sect of the Pharisees, he had adopted the interpretations of a human school, rather than the genuine and uncorrupted spirit of God's revelations to the Jews. Perhaps the radical fault of his character, until it had been thoroughly broken down and disciplined by the divine teaching, by alternate chastisement and consolation, was a presumptuous self-confidence, the way of thinking very common among us, that God cannot, as it were, do without us; that we must not deprive His service of the energy that we have in us; that in every emergency which the ardour of our imaginations invests with a character of consummate religious importance, we must not leave Him to work out His own ways, but must rather stretch a point with our consciences than stand idle. Saul vainly imagined, that on the first appearance of Christ's religion, God's religion was in danger, God's honour was at stake; that he was bound to take the vindication of them into his own hands; and that as they could not be vindicated, as he conceived, except by violent measures, therefore he was justified by the emergency of the case, in taking the thunderbolt out of Jehovah's hand, and scattering death and destruction after a fashion which he was perfectly well aware would have been gross sin under ordinary circumstances. Such then are the positive merits and demerits of Saul's character before his conversion: and if they may be balanced against one another, his relative merits, as compared with the rest of his class, will certainly incline the scale in his favour. Gamaliel and others may have been exceptions to the general character of the sect to which they belonged together with Saul: but what was that general character for which the Pharisees are held up as warnings through every generation? The more outward show they made of holiness and austerity, the more are we warned against them, for they were "hypocrites." They "made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but within they were full of extortion and excess." They are likened to "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful without but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." "Do ye not after their works; for they say and do not." Surely Saul did not partake in any of these respects of that leaven of the Pharisees which our Lord so emphatically denounced.

Again: the character of the Gentiles of the time is not so strongly marked in Scripture as that of the Pharisees: but we hear enough of them to feel that we should do great wrong to the zealous Israelite in comparing him with Gallio, who cared for no question of religious truth; or Pilate, who asked scoffingly, what is truth? or Felix, and Festus, and Agrippa, who were cruel from policy, and infidels from indifference. Profane History may fill up the outline which the Acts so faintly shadow forth, of the character of the wise men and philosophers of

Athens. Some mocked at the preaching of St. Paul, others would carelessly put off hearing him to another time. Generally, they prided themselves on being above vulgar prejudices, on rejecting all ideas of God which were not deduced from human learning, on rising superior to the ancient traditions still afloat in the world about Providence and a judgment to come. They regarded all religious systems as equally true and equally false. The Pharisees were unclean: the Gentiles were indifferent. Saul was neither one nor the other: and it was Saul accordingly whom, in spite of all his imperfections, God chose to Himself to bear His name before both the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel also.

In making this selection, therefore, of the subject of His most remarkable conversion, the Divine Being seems to make, if we may so say, a solemn declaration against the error of supposing that He regards with peculiar favour those who repent of such sins as those above mentioned, or delights to make the brightest examples of His powers in such as He converts from them. But this is not all. We may perhaps be permitted to trace still further signs of virtue and merit on St. Paul's part, which might assist in attracting to him, if I may so speak, the attention and favour of his Master. Perhaps the special mercy which he met with was intended as a declaration of the Divine approbation of the zeal with which he clung to what, though ignorantly, he still believed to be the cause of God. We know that St. Paul had been instructed in the literature of the Gentiles: he was well versed in the opinions of their doctors and philosophers. He was a Roman citizen, and was probably, from his station in life, well acquainted with the temper and views current in educated society among the Gentiles. He must have known then how entirely the tenor of those opinions ran counter to the doctrines of the sect and religion to which he belonged. He must have felt the tremendous force with which all the arguments popular among the learned about the indifference of actions and doctrines, the imperfection of human ideas of truth, the insecurity of human testimony, and so forth, must have borne upon the shallow and unsound edifice which his instructors had built upon the foundation of Moses and the Prophets, and which they appeared to have inseparably incorporated the one with the other. He knew the hypocrisy and falsehood of the ablest and most admired of the upholders of the system of the Pharisees and of Judaism altogether; and he trembled for the stability of a church which seemed to depend upon such broken reeds; he trembled for the ark of God, when he desperately thrust forth his hand to support it. But still the system of the Pharisees was that in which he had been brought up, which he had learned at the feet of Gamaliel. He had strong faith in the simple fact at least, that God's truth was conveyed through it, though his heart misgave him that he could not penetrate through the folds of its human traditions up to the kernel of the divine revelation. Yet that system was still to him the shrine within which the sacred treasure was locked; it was the temple, in which, beyond many a court, and through many a gate, lay the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary of the living God: into which only the High Priest could enter, and that only once a year. And he took up arms in defence of the Temple, in the faith that it contained the Sanctuary. He fought for every stone and for every brick, in the faith that he was defending the God within. And so he would have fought to the last, till he had perished in the ruins of his creed. But God looked with favour upon his faith and zeal, and rewarded him with a special grace: so that, ere yet the gates were burst asunder, and the ramparts swept into the fosse beneath, he heard the rending of the veil, and the creaking of the inner doors, and a voice from Heaven—The God hath departed!—and the crash of the God departing!

This, we may be allowed to believe, is a temper and character with which our

merciful and considerate Master is well pleased. He has inspired individuals and nations with portions of His divine truth: and He has watched over the ideas which that truth has fostered within them, and allowed them to mould themselves into systems, and occupy every corner of the human heart, and supply for a time every want which the heart could conceive. And when those ideas have performed their office in shaping the character of a nation and directing its course through the world, and the truth begins to wither and scale away, but the outward system to harden and stiffen around it; then does He raise out of it a new and tender shoot that shall in time thrust it aside, when it has imbibed and thriven upon all the virtue that remains in the old. So it was, that one form of belief was allowed by God's moral government to grow out of another in the heathen world; so it was, but far more distinctly, as being the appointed antitype of God's moral government, that Christianity was raised into life out of the dying limbs of Judaism; and so it has been, that different views even of Christian belief, and different forms and systems have been evolved out of one another in the mysterious dealings of Divine Providence. But throughout all these appointed changes He would seem especially to have loved and honoured those, who with unshrinking faith in the truth which they possessed, and unabated reverence for the forms in which it had been conveyed to them, and a grateful recollection of the blessings which it had brought to their fathers, have still fought to the last for the remnant that still was, rather than throw themselves recklessly upon the future, of which only the shadow had yet appeared. Such persons God has taken under His own especial care: and when He has seen fit to declare Himself for the new reformation—when He has left His accustomed temples, and burst the imprisonment of obsolete form and usage—He has taken them gently by the hand, as He did the Apostle Paul, leading them into other pastures, and giving them greater honour in a new country.

The Chosen of God

BY REV. WILFRID RICHMOND, M.A.

"He is a chosen vessel unto Me."—Acts ix. 15.

It is a good thing for a man to set forth on his life's work, still more for him to carry it through, under the sense that he is a chosen man, chosen to do this work. And St. Paul was above all men a chosen man. His life is the greatest instance in history of great things done, great and momentous changes wrought, through God's dealings with an individual man, with a man who was man and no more than man.

He was charged with the fulfilment of the desire of the heart of Christ. From time to time in our Lord's life, and more and more towards its close, we see Him looking out with an unsatisfied longing across the borders of the chosen people towards the wider world beyond. The very words in which He describes the limitation of His mission to the Jews, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel," betray a sense of confinement and restraint. When, after breaking the custom of His people and talking with a Samaritan who lived outside the pale, He said to His disciples, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields that they are white already to harvest," it is difficult not to believe that this longing was already present in His mind. When He praised the centurion who had faith in the authority of His word and said, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel," He added, "many shall come from the east and from the west,

and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." Sometimes sorrow for His rejection by His own people is mingled with the hope of the wider harvest. It is so markedly in the time before His Passion. When Andrew and Philip tell Him of the Greeks who have sought Him out, His answer is: "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Now is My Soul troubled and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name." And the parables of the Holy Week speak distinctly of the time when the Kingdom of God, which was to be taken away from the Jews, should be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

This restrained purpose, this unsatisfied longing of the Saviour of the world, it was St. Paul's office to fulfil. He is the organ and the instrument of the wider Love of Jesus. As he claimed for himself that he filled up that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ, so his work fulfilled the work of Christ, Whose work, indeed, was so to fill the hearts of those to whom He revealed Himself with the fulness of the Father's Love, that they could not fail to carry it to those wider fields on which He had looked out with longing.

And so, with the unsatisfied longing of Christ burning in his heart, he worked the mighty miracle; he brought in thousands of souls into the fold of mercy; finding the Gospel the faith of a small company of Jews, he carried it half across the civilized world, he planted it at the heart and centre of the radiating influence of Rome, he left it already in promise and in hope, the spiritual life of mankind and of the world.

So the vocation of the chosen man widens out from its centre in the heart and conscience of the single soul to the world-wide fulfilment of the eternal purpose of the love of God in the Eternal Son.

This is the example for all time of the chosen man, the example, the picture, the typical case. But only the typical case, the eminent example. What is true of St. Paul is true—should be true in our measure—of all of us, of every one of us as one, as individual souls.

There is the common point between St. Paul with his unique spiritual experience, and us with our ordinary, and perhaps not very spiritual, experience. St. Paul is intensely conscious of his own individuality. His own mind, his own purpose, his own sufferings, his own difficulties, his own experiences, his own responsibility, the fulfilment of his own mission, are all-important to him. We, too, are pre-occupied with ourselves. We, too, are full of our own difficulties, our own troubles, our own temptations, our own responsibilities, our own fate, our own experience. But there is something else needed, something more than an intense consciousness of our own individuality, to make us like St. Paul.

The chosen man is conscious of himself; he cannot but be conscious of himself, but he is conscious of himself because he is first of all conscious of God. God is the dominant fact of his own individual life. God fills the scene, though the scene is the scene of the individual heart and mind. He writes with the bold assumption of the authority of an Apostle; but it is because the God of our Fathers has appointed him. He is an Apostle by God's call, by God's separating will, by God's fore-ordained choice. God first!

St. Paul is a Jew. He is not only a Jew, he is *the* Jew. He represents the true tradition, the true issue, of the genius and spirit of Jewish religion. And it was this—God first. So they wrote their history—it was not their history, it was the history of God's dealings with them, of His initial choice, of His revelation of Himself, of His long forbearance, of His searching judgments, of His pardon and His restoration.

And this is the root character of religion—God first, the dominance of God in the secret heart and soul. A man is a religious man when once for all this thing has come about, that God has become for him the overmastering fact of his own individual life, so that the soul itself becomes to its own self the sacred scene of the manifestation and working of the searching and commanding Love of God.

Ah! to many of us it seems a distant ideal. God looms on us from afar. Through the mists that fill our world to-day; to our dim vision, to our clouded judgment, He seems only to be very slowly making His way towards the command of our souls, very slowly revealing Himself as the Truth of life and of the world. But towards this truth, though it seems distant, must our face be set if religion is to become real to us.

God looms on us from afar, it may be, if it be through conscience and *Duty* that He makes His approach. We may linger long in the outer courts of morality. We may use duties to hide ourselves from duty. So many men do live, wrapt up in the performance of the duties of their position, in the conscientious fulfilment of the obligations of their business, sometimes pleading that the pressure of duties and obligations leaves them no leisure for religion; sometimes claiming that after all what God requires of a man is this, to do his duty in the state of life in which he finds himself; sometimes—most dangerous condition of all—professing to be religious, professing to be occupied with duties done towards God, but all the time God does not rule in his soul; He has not taken the command, the door has not been opened to Him, and for all his professing the man is never himself, because he is never face to face with God, he has not made the one sincere surrender to the Spirit by which in all his life he has willed and wills to be ruled. And to all of these, duties are drugs. They help to keep the life of the soul in abeyance, though they cannot altogether hush it to sleep. Conscience remains God's witness, conscience in its lower forms waiting till we will let it rise and grow into its higher form, in which it becomes the unveiled vision of Him, to Whom henceforth day by day in all the details of business, in all the duties of life, we learn to say what rose to our lips at the first, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

God looms on us from afar—perhaps until some great *Emotion* comes and in a moment He is here. To some He comes in an hour of sorrow, in the experience of human sympathy; to some in a moment of unlooked for and overwhelming happiness; to some there grows upon them by degrees through the tender and earnest love of a Christian home, through the fellowships and friendships of our common Christian life, through the experience of grace and the victories over sin, through sacraments and prayers, through sins repented and through duties done, there grows upon them in the air they breathe, as the light in which they walk, the ever-deepening sense of His all-penetrating presence, to Whose service they have devoted all their lives. And yet even to such souls there come moments of revelation. To some He comes as to St. Paul, as their heads are bowed in the dust in penitence, and the truth that breaks upon them is like a blinding glare.

God looms on us from afar. He waits. But at the last every soul fails of its spiritual possibility on which the Truth does not some day break, either by the gradual steps of a growing dawn of the Divine glory, or in the flash of the sudden brightness above the brightness of the noonday sun. "Thou—thou art a chosen vessel unto Me."

Chosen for what? Who can say? To you, and to you only, can the message come. Chosen to holiness, chosen to purity, chosen to righteousness—that we know! Chosen to service, chosen to some service which is and is to be your own, your own and no one's else, for which you are fitted and to which you are

called ; service in the vocation which you now treat as a business, not as a vocation, or in some new life into which you are called on to step forth. But to what service ? Who but you can say ? nor you until you do it. But chosen unto Him, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Lord of all the world—Lord above all by the mastery which He exerts over every single spirit in the multitudinous spiritual world, over every single spirit as though it were a world alone, leaving to each at his own will the power to kick against the goad, but at the last to bow himself and say, “ Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? ” and to go forth and do it, and show forth the glory of God.

The Lord's Chosen Vessel

BY VERY REV. J. S. HOWSON, D.D.

“ *A chosen vessel unto Me,* ” &c.—*Acts ix. 15.*

Limiting ourselves to the phrase selected out of this sentence, and omitting all reference to St. Paul's standing before “ kings,” to his prolonged testimony unto the “ children of Israel,” and to his manifold “ sufferings,” we pause in the presence of this lowly word “ vessel ”—this ignominious word, if we will. It is true, as this Apostle himself tells us (and is not his metaphor a reminiscence, a far-off echo, of what was said to him at Damascus by Ananias ?), that “ in a great house there are some vessels to honour and some to dishonour.” Still, the word itself expresses simply what is made for some use, and is absolutely helpless and dead, except so far as it is applied to some use. The “ vessel ” can do nothing of itself. Take the word in one of its popular senses, and this is enough for our purpose ; and we are quite safe in keeping ourselves for the moment within the limit of the popular English translation. Think of those noble “ vessels ” on the sea, that go from shore to shore, interchanging the products of the earth and associating man with man. Still, except so far as they are moved by the influence of forces quite independent of themselves, and under a control for which they themselves have no responsibility, they are motionless and valueless. And such is the language in which the Lord speaks of His Apostle. He is merely an instrument in Divine hands, and of himself he can do nothing.

And if such language is fit to describe an Apostle, what are we to say of ourselves, and of our own poor place in this world ? What can we do for God, except so far as He uses us ? What power have we of resisting the circumstances in the midst of which He has placed us ? The utmost humility becomes us—the utmost submissiveness—when we read this description of an Apostle, and when we think what *we* are in the presence of God, and with the weight of the duties which He appoints for us.

Yet, though absolute in power, and with His instruments entirely dependent upon Him, He does not select those instruments at random. St. Paul was not simply a “ vessel,” but a “ chosen vessel.” There were reasons for the choice, some of which are very evident ; while, regarding others, we, with our weak human powers of judgment, must not expect to be able to pronounce an opinion. Sometimes, as we are told on the highest authority, God chooses “ the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty,” so that “ no flesh should glory in His presence.” Sometimes, but not always ; and in the case of St. Paul, we can see the following qualifications at least for his unique office of bringing in the Gentiles to be combined with the Hebrews in one Christian Church. He was a man of eager zeal, of in-

domitable energy, of surprising mental power, of quick sympathy, of persuasiveness, of industry and perseverance. In the early days at Tarsus he had been in contact with the habits of thought and with the social life of the Gentiles of the day. He had the benefit of the Greek culture of his native city. Both he and his father were Roman citizens: the habits of mercantile intercourse were familiar to him; while in the schools of Jerusalem he became thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew learning, so that he knew well all the points of contact between the Old Testament and the heathen world.

And we, too, have our qualifications for the work which God assigns to us, and it is no true humility to be blind to them. It may, indeed, be the qualification of weakness; and to some extent, no doubt, it must be so; but then we have the Lord's strength to lean upon. His strength to help us, His strength to be infused into our weakness; and probably nay, certainly there are direct qualifications, in special opportunities, in aptitudes of temperament, and the like, which He intends us to use, and in using which we shall find a very great part of our happiness.

St. Paul's happiness was that he was a "chosen vessel," to bear a most precious freight from shore to shore. That freight was the "Name" of Jesus Christ, with its rich meaning, its consolation for all sorrow, its pardon for all sin, its promises for all temptation. He, indeed, was only as a "vessel" for a great enterprise across the waters (probably this seafaring image is as good as any for our purpose, especially in this our mercantile country), but he was a "chosen" vessel; and the breath of the Holy Spirit filled the sails, and the hand of Jesus was on the helm.

And is not this our mission in the world—to "bear" the "Name" of Jesus—not simply to "bear" it passively, as our highest honour, but actively to carry it onward, to convey it to others, so that they may share this privilege; not simply to be "called Christians," but to make others Christians too? This festival appeals to us with peculiar force, because, by origin, we are "*Gentiles*." Let us give to it the due place which belongs to it among the sacred voices of the year, so that we may be more conscious of, and may with more faithfulness endeavour to fulfil, the vocation to which our Master has called us after the pattern of St. Paul.

The Prospect of Suffering an Incentive to Christ's Service

BY REV. H. M. BUTLER, D.D.

"I will show him how many things he must suffer," &c.—Acts ix. 16.

Not, observe, how many or how great things he must do, but how many things he must suffer. The Lord knew what manner of man it was on whom He was even now laying His hand of consecration, and He knew that nothing could so stir and nerve him to carry His Name proudly before all the forces of the enemy as to show him on each perilous march the multitude of the things which he should suffer in its cause.

I would ask you to think upon this—the prospect of suffering, not as the condition only, but as the attraction, of a life's career.

The spirit of the Gospels is heroic, or it is nothing. Just as the Master said of old, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven," so we seem to

hear Him say of all such counsels of imperfection, Except your incentives to a life's career shall be nobler than the incentives popularly accepted as sufficient, ye have yet to learn the meaning of My service. I do not say to My servants, Give Me your hearts, and ye shall be famous and successful and happy ; but, Give Me your hearts ; map out your lives along the lines that I shall trace for you ; be ready to bear My Name and carry out My principles in whatever path I may set before you ; and then, as My highest mark of favour, I will show you how many things ye must suffer for that Name's sake.

It is the language of paradox, but then is it not the language of Christ ?

Perhaps you reply, Jesus is not speaking in these tones to every man. He is speaking to St. Paul, one of the most exceptional men that ever lived, so exceptional, indeed, that in the whole long catalogue of Christian Saints there has really never been one whose personality we could for a moment confuse with his. One star differeth from another star in form as in glory, and this star shines out with a brilliance and distinctiveness of its own. Can we treat of so exceptional a man as if he were in any sense typical of ourselves ?

We are starting here a wide question. It is hardly less than this, What is the spiritual value of ideals ? Do we gain most light from counsels specially adapted to our own surroundings and our own recognized standard of conduct, or from appeals which put our own individuality aside, save in so far as each man has in him something of the image of God, point to the highest standard of all, and say boldly, " Do good, hoping for nothing again ; Rejoice and be exceeding glad when ye are called to suffer for My Name ; Be ye perfect, even as your Father Who is in Heaven is perfect " ?

My friends, these words are not words only. Our systems of philosophy may find it difficult to make room for the joy of anticipated suffering, but the facts of life seem to prove that it is one of those mighty agents which, in scriptural language, move mountains. On the one hand, heroic and saintly spirits find in the prospect of suffering for a great cause and a loved Master a charm beyond every other charm ; on the other, even the less heroic and the less saintly find in these appeals something which lays hold on a genuine part of themselves. Nay more, they find in them, and in the lives visibly inspired by them, just the one force which stirs them most, and makes them ask whether the atmosphere of their own lives, however heavy with the worldliness of custom, cannot even now receive the infusion of some fresh elements of daring and devotion.

You have most of you still to lay down the lines of your life's career. Some of those lives will, as the world counts greatness and littleness, be brilliant and powerful ; far more must in the nature of things be obscure. But whether brilliant or obscure, they may not only be Christian in the popular acceptance of the word—which, in truth, is very poor and very unsatisfying—but they may be Christianly heroic ; they may have in them just that one product of the Christian faith which in the days of our youth seems to us almost the greatest and most characteristic—I mean the readiness to dare something, to face something, to suffer something, if only Christ count us worthy. In thinking what you will be and do, what causes you will serve, what leaders you will follow, either in speculation, or in action, or in religion, take account of this prospect of suffering. Do not ask only or chiefly, How many things or how great things can I do ? What giant evil can I strike down ? What shape of social falsehood can I unmask ? What new form of innocent pleasure can I invent or organize or help to diffuse among the poor, the uncultured, the degraded ?

All these are worthy aims, but there is a yet worthier, to which our subject has drawn us. It is this : How best can I drink of the cup that Christ drank so

deeply? How can I best confront failure, disappointment, disillusion, misrepresentation, injustice? Where are the lost causes, the forlorn hopes, the discredited impossibilities on which that which is most Divine in me can, by the grace of my Maker, fasten? Where shall I find leaders who can say to me, on the moral and spiritual fields of battle, as the generals of Revolutionary France were wont to say to their troops a century ago, before the first love of that new and strange baptism had begun to wax cold, "Go and get killed there for the country"?

Whenever the love of Christ, in either of its sacred senses—either the consciousness of His vast, unmerited, unwearied love to us, or, again, something, however feeble, of a corresponding love on our parts to Him—whenever, I say, the love of Christ takes first hold and then possession of a young man's soul, these are the questions which he puts to himself. He cannot help putting them; a necessity is upon him. The fire of that sacred love may cool, and he may "become as another man." But as long as it is there, burning brightly and burning hotly, he must put these questions. They are his life. He must put them, and he must win from his Saviour some answer. It is the old wrestling of the patriarch with the Angel, feeble but victorious, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

How the Divine answer will come, the preacher cannot predict. His office is done when, speaking on Christ's behalf, he has reminded one and another brother's soul that, in the sight of its Maker and its Redeemer, it is precious, and dignified, and capable not only of integrity but of heroic service.

If I might presume to guide a single prayer of any young man who hears me, a single communing between himself and his God, I would counsel him to ask just this: O Lord, Who knowest all things, prepare me for suffering. Make me strong to suffer, if it be Thy will, and to help others to suffer. Show me something of the mystery of Thine Agony and Thy life-long Cross, and in Thine own time make me, even me, perfect through suffering.

The Disclosure of a Career

BY REV. J. T. FORBES, M.A.

"I will show him how many things he must suffer," &c.—Acts ix. 16.

This announcement might be thought extraordinary, regarded as a means of inducing a man to adopt the new and dangerous career of a Christian missionary. To inform him that his work is to be something on the grand scale, something wider than national, affecting foreign rulers and peoples, is an inspiration. To join with this the prediction that the condition and accompaniment of this task will be suffering appears strange.

The strangeness vanishes if we consider Who the Revealer was and to whom the announcement was made. The One Who described His own mission as coming "to bear witness unto the truth," must disclose His prevision of the future so far as to free His new follower from illusions as to the nature of His service. But the same insight that foresees the inevitable issue of such a service as Saul's sees also that the knowledge of the truth is itself the inspiration such a soul needs for the new task. The Jesus of history read the secret motives and saw the springs of action in men's minds. Often in His following men had appeared of a type easily deterred from embarking on any enterprise by the knowledge of the price in pain of success. The new convert was moulded of different stuff. Already he recoiled from himself, remembering the persecuting activity, greater as blunder even than as a crime of his life. And the prospect held out to him of a service whose badge

was suffering was welcome as offering in some sort atonement ; and in any case the chance of bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

Paul taught men to forget things that were behind ; but some things he would not be able to forget : that he had been " a persecutor and injurious " was one. This prediction met his moods of passionate regret. It gave him the sense of atoning in some fashion for past days ; it gave him his manhood and his self-respect.

As a matter of fact we know that this prediction, or the forecast of which it is Luke's expression, did become, not a deterrent, but an inspiration to one of the fullest lives this world has ever seen. In the world of military science the figure of Napoleon is not to be ignored ; nor in religion the figure of Paul. This prevision of pain was the disclosure of a career of vast import to the moral order of the world. He is missionary, writer, moralist, theologian—and in each of the activities of his life greater than the men who are specialists in one alone. As he suffers, he acts ; as he endures he conquers.

Let us think of this matter thus : In this passage we have endurance as the revelation, task, discipline, and prerogative of life for the greatest of ends.

The last part one would wish to play before an assemblage of those who, in most cases, are just getting into the full current of life would be that of a kill-joy. But I do not make any apology for saying that any genuine revelation of life will have a large place in it for the fact of endurance. At the time when incitement and inspiration are most needed ; when a man is about to gird on his armour for the fight—his unveiled future is presented to him as a disclosure of suffering. And so far from acting as a deterrent, this revelation is as a trumpet-call. He tastes " Reality's infinite sweetness." And no one who cares about truth wants to be told anything but the facts about life. And the facts are that suffering awaits us, and that it does not admit of evasion.

It is not set out merely as an inevitable element, but as the task of life, it is the means of accomplishing the work to which the call has come. It was through wrench and strain Paul broke away from Judaism and freed Christianity from the fate of sinking into a sect. It was through the stress of thought he gave Europe its theology. It was through pain of oversight and organisation he moulded the Church. Out of his sufferings—in mind and body—a new world has been born. To win men from error and the tyranny of lust meant the agony of conflict. It was Paul's task. In it he found joy ; beyond it he found joy. But the joy he found in it was the joy of abounding and victorious life—of forms of happiness near to pain. He suffered with Christ and he reigned with Him. His joys were as high as his pains were exceptional.

It is to be desired that we should get away from the conception of suffering as being the passive endurance of the shock of circumstance, and of religion's main business as consolation. The suffering which awaits this man is the inevitable experience of a career crowded with action and incident. Paul knew physical trial, but he was not a pallid, bedridden creature exemplifying his Christian graces on a couch of pain. He was an epoch-maker ; a man whose life was crowded with thrilling experiences. His sufferings were incidental to his work. They are comparable to the harsh experiences of explorers or the nerve-strain and battle-thrill of a great captain. It is not the martyr only who wears a crown of thorns ; it is the man who is in command in all fields ; who carries responsibility, and whose thoughts are weighted with the cares of many lives. They have their high joys, experiences of discovery, of success, of the glad exercise of competent faculty ; but these things are the festivals of life. Men see them ; the workers know how great things they suffer for the work's sake.

The question is on what grounds and to what intent a man is going to use his life? The disagreeables, the things to be endured, the sufferings that are the direct result of one's choice of aim, will come, whether the aim be high or low. Yet the character of the experience will not be the same. If there be no sense of the supreme plan, no vision of the order and the King in Whose interests the experiences are undergone, if the reference of them be personal only, the experiences will be fruitless of anything but commonplace complaints of the vacuity of life. Or if a man try to evade pain, then his fate will be like that of Tito in *Romola*. He will begin by making shields of other lives to ward off from himself the shock of circumstance: there will be small futilities to evade the roughness of truth, and then great ones. Until in the end moral gangrene sets in and the soul corrupts in the living man.

The suggestion of it all is that life is planned for the hard and great things. There are two tragedies in life we are told. The first is not getting what you want and the second is getting it. They reduce themselves to one because a man never wholly gets his desire. Success itself can come to know solitude. Its sees admiration wane and followers grow scant. Or it comes when, in the great words of Johnson, a man is "old, and cannot enjoy it lonely and cannot share it." But the aim of a discipline so rude is surely in proportion to its rigour. No price appears to the Moulder of life too great to be paid for the making of a man.

Altruism takes it for granted it is a man's business to spend himself for the world. Religion calls it consecration and summons to it. Christ's call is to a life of action. The world wants consecrated persons. But it is needful, also, to have something to consecrate. If personality is to be a gift, its value must be, as the self has been developed or not, great or small. But what Christianity tells us is that these two things, the growth of the man and the service of men, cannot be sharply separated. A man cannot say: "I will train my mind and cultivate my inner being up to a certain time, and then I will come out of my seclusion and give myself to public work, or will make all my life bear on the help of others." Soul and service increase together; culture is a thing of communion. It has to do with sharing personal wealth—one's self with the world.

The special demand of Christianity made in the words, "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake," yields a new ideal along with a new reading of the facts of life. It is a direct address to the courage of Saul. No coward could receive such a message unmoved. It is the giving of the chivalrous heart the front place in the work of the new Kingdom. The energies and valour of early manhood are stamped with the image and super-scription of Christ. The exacting ideals and hot emotions of the fresh years of life are enlisted. Christ refuses to address anything but the highest in His man.

Mr. Garrod says that Christianity produced chivalry as a pin-prick produces reaction. It was the protest of the hardy North: "Chivalry and honour are the product of Christianity in so far as they are an undefined and instinctive protest against it." He quotes the words of Paul: "Being reviled we bless; being persecuted we endure, being defamed we entreat," and says: "Against all that, so unnatural, so pusillanimous, so impossible, the ideal of honour is a righteous and necessary and enduring protest." As to chivalry, in the Bible it has been shown that Abraham's refusal of the spoils and Joseph's honour are examples of its spirit, but there is a better reply.

Opinions may vary as to what constitutes unnaturalness; they do not probably vary as to what is the central aim of Christianity. It is that men may live according to their true nature. But Nature is an advancing, expanding thing. It is to be judged by the later and not the earlier forms. "First, that which is

natural ; afterwards, that which is spiritual." And Christ's demand for suffering is broadly the demand to transform primitive prowess into the moral fighting virtues. He is asking that the oppositions a new crusade is sure to meet with be countered, not by force, but by the weapons of the soul. It is not much wonder that the northern barbarians did not understand the spirit of Christianity. We do not understand it yet. It is the line of human evolution Christ is concerned with. And He is transforming the fighting that is a necessary condition of life. It is being lifted on to the moral plane. The principle of conflict as the principle of advance is not changed ; but the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. And the man is not most loyal to the essence of the fighting virtue in men who insists that it shall always use the same weapons. An acute thinker has well asked, "Should we have been true to the inventor of the tallow candle by refusing the light of gas and electricity ? The merchants of the old light might say so, but if the inventor's idea was to give light, we are true to his idea to-day by setting aside his invention." The defence of the fighting quality lies in its capacity for transformation—and Christ transforms it. He brings against opposition the forces of the soul. He proposes to conquer hostile forces with weapons of peace and sweet reasonableness. If men reject His message, refuse the Gospel and all it brings, His messengers are at liberty to be killed, but not to kill. They can have the most reckless adventures, can display the extremes of human courage, and run all risks ; but all they do is at the price of their own suffering, not of the suffering of others. The specially Christian type of gallantry can be, like the Apostle Paul, "in deaths oft," but its business is to bear, not to inflict.

The price of a life is a life. The price of everything worth having is paid in kind ; for mental conquest, mental sweat ; for moral conquest, labour of heart and even the pouring forth of the soul unto death. No fruit without pain is the law. Find a man who has done great things ; find an obscure life that has been greatly lived ; a life that is to be measured not by its accumulations, but its giving, and you will find one that has plucked out the heart of the mystery of suffering, whose doing and whose bearing none can sever. Ask the great ones of human service what the price of accomplishment is. What did it cost Joseph Mazzini to struggle for a nation's freedom ? What did it cost Josephine Butler to labour for women's honour ? And the answer is best given in Christ's words : "I will show My servants how great things they must suffer for My Name's sake."

Once more this utterance sets open the gates of the fullest life to Christ's servants. They are not going to be victorious over self or the world through stripping life, but by filling it full. And Christ summons to a full life. Christian saintliness has nothing to do with the conception of the anchorite of the Thebaid. I want to say to any man who is conscious that high aims and vulgar sins can make a home in the same personality, who is in the middle of a personal struggle, that while victory may necessitate excision, excision is not victory. That can only come from an opposite passion ; not from a starved, but from a full life. Christianity offers you the thrill of battle—fulness of experience. Christ's handling of life is not the ascetic's. It is the deprivation of nothing that belongs to the essential man. He recognises that the soul's need is expansion ; the excitement of conflict ; the inrush of the forces of true being ; the carrying to the highest power of the possibilities of human development. To possess one's self, to win one's own soul means the thrill of life. In this war, not the starved and stunted powers, but the powers rightly directed and possessed by a master passion win. "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." When Christ teaches a man's hands to war and his fingers to fight against evil, the spirit of the campaign possesses him ; the enlargement, the fulness of life that Nature

eried out for, becomes a spirit of moral health. It opens the door into the larger life. It is quite useless, besides being mistaken, to teach a Christianity that mutilates normal nature. Only we read normal nature in Christ Jesus. Men desire—and rightly desire—full lives; and if these cannot be found in right ways they will be found in wrong. The even, the calm and the average contents no ardent soul.

We are sometimes told to-day that we must not expect very much of men. I hope to God we shall never learn this lesson. The triumphs of the past have been gained by those who made tremendous demands on human nature; the greatest generals of the world worked their men unmercifully; and the greatest religious leaders have done the same. They were exacting with themselves; they were exacting with others; and they learned it from Christ. He asked the extremest things of men; He offered crosses and cups of suffering, and baptisms of pain. He showed men "how great things they must suffer for His Name's sake."

Many think that the task of Christianity in the immediate future will be as great as it has ever faced. At one time the work was to free religion from Judaism; at another the Christianisation of the German races; at another the recovery of the free access of the soul to God; at another the destruction of formalism; and yet again the realisation of the responsibility of the Church for the non-Christian world. To-day it is different. No unfinished task can be dropped, but the special labour to which men are being summoned is the carrying out of the moral implications of the Christian Gospel.

It will not be possible much longer for society to continue to live by different sets of principles. And in the capturing of human activities for faith there will be conflict and there will be suffering. Interests that are opposed to righteousness, whether the owning of Gadarene swine, the making of pagan shrines, or the exploiting of human infirmity and every modern equivalent, will fight to the death with the laws of Christ, and I can hear the words said to each of those who are bent on serving, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

All the success Christianity has had has been because in its Founder there was no difference between principle and practice. He asked men to carry crosses, and He carried a cross. He asked men to die for truth, and He died for truth. The Preacher of the Sermon on the Mount went to Calvary for His own ideals, and as He lifted up He draws men unto Him. And when He has followers whose ingenuity is not spent in harmonising a revolutionary ethic with present-day standards—men who are prepared to go where the truth carries them—the regenerating forces of His Gospel, at present largely stifled, will be set free. God will stretch forth His hand to heal, and signs and wonders will be done in the name of His holy Child, Jesus.

The Discipline of Life

BY REV. JAMES VAUGHAN, M.A.

"I will show him how great things he must suffer," &c.—Acts ix. 16.

God is revealing to Ananias His purposes concerning Saul, whom He had just called to His Apostleship. He says that he is "to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel." And we are looking—after those words—to hear what great things he shall do in this mission, when lo! God changes it altogether, and does not say at all what His chosen servant shall do

but adds, "for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Thus, in the mind of God, even then, the passive was higher than the active; and what His servant was to bear was of more importance than what he was to perform.

And no wonder! The "ministry of life" is what we do for God; the "discipline of life" is what God does for us.

The "ministry of life" is the exercise of His grace; but the "discipline of life" is the actual preparation for His glory.

There are many who would admire and copy the Saviour's busy life of love; but we cannot forget that even He was what He was, more by what He suffered, than by what He did; and (if we may compare where all is infinite) the passive, even in Jesus, was above the active—the things done to Him greater and more important than the things done by Him.

Very wrong however would it be to separate the life of ministry and the life of discipline, as if they were two things. St. Paul himself generally found his discipline in his ministry.

Whoever has tried to work for God, has found how much to humble, to prove, to oppress, and to grieve—in other words, how much discipline—there is in every attempt to do good.

It is to be questioned whether the two can ever be divided. Nevertheless, St. Paul—recounting the history and the boast of his Apostleship in 2 Cor. xi. tells far more of what he had suffered, than what he had achieved.

The aged saint's retrospect, when his course is well-nigh done, is a very echo to the promise which God made him in the text, when he was just entering on the race.

God had shewn him how great things he must suffer; and why? his personal sanctification after all was greater than all his work, and the truest ministry in us is the image of the Man of Sorrows.

I doubt not, in that day when we shall make many strange discoveries, it will be seen that some poor suffering child of God, confined for years to a darkened chamber, in the depth of life's seclusion, weak, patient, silent, holy, eloquent only in her gentleness, and full of prayer, subdued, and Christ-like, did more and better service here than many a standard-bearer in the Church's ranks, whose good deeds won the laurels of the saints, and whose name is the property of many generations.

And how much do the ministering ones owe to the disciplined ones!

Sermons, missions, sacred undertakings, brave enterprises—what would they be if it were not for the tried and secret ones, far in the back ground, whose remembrance of these things before God, even while they lie themselves the closest prisoners of life, waft and propel them to their glorious issues!

Remember this, brethren! and lay it up in your hearts; for any one of us may need it any day for our comfort. It may please your Heavenly Father suddenly to cut short the active career of the busiest and most useful amongst you. You may be sent back crippled or impotent into the shade of a comparative solitude, where you will scarcely be heard of beyond the walls of your own home.

What then? Is the ministry of life over?

God forbid! Did Moses not serve, or Aaron or Hur, when the two latter held up the hands of the former in prayer upon the mount; though they did not fight with Amalek in the plain?

Or Samuel, when in his later years he retired to the college of the prophets—an intercessor for Saul and Israel?

Or, was the least part of our Blessed Lord's ministry—those nights spent watching and fasting on the mountain top?

Rather, in your own room, and with that weakened frame, you may shed around you an atmosphere, and breathe an influence, and wield a power (as God's remembrancer), which shall reach as far, and do a work to the full as great, as when you used to go out in the morning, free and at the top of your strength, to your errands of daily love!

It is not to be questioned but that in God's wise care, the discipline of life, both in its nature and its degree, is accurately and exquisitely accommodated to the individual character which that discipline is intended to mould.

Any one who knew the natural temperament (earnest and headlong)—of St. Paul, or of St. Peter, or of St. James, or—(loving though he was)—of St. John—himself also a son of thunder, might have calculated that that would be, which came to pass—that the corrections in the experience of life would be great.

Perhaps, if we knew all, we should be able to trace a singular adaptation of the particular trial to the habit of each one's mind.

May not an irritable person, for this very reason, because he is irritable, be exposed the more—throughout life—to what is very vexing? May not the proud heart be rent, through the more humiliating providences? Have we not seen ardent and impetuous characters visited with afflictions which specially confined and cramped them? Persons with idolatrous affections particularly tried in their attachments? Others, endangered by the world, hedged up and prevented by something that made them incapable or unwilling to go into much society? Have not the impatient to wait the longer? The censorious and satirical themselves to bear the shafts of the more unkindness? Nay! are not men's punishments very often made out of the fabric of their sins? Is there not a wonderful retribution by which what is wrong in us recoils upon us again?

So that, were an Angel to go with us through this world, and visit with us its many wards of various, and—as they sometimes seem—capricious and arbitrary sorrow; could he not in every instance point out a singular propriety in that particular visitation? Why this one is blind? Or that deaf? Or why that other one is weak? Another so excruciated? Or another so bereaved? Or another kept so long at the door of his expectations? Or another so continually galled? Or another so miserably mortified?

Depend upon it, there is one key which unlocks them all; and that key is the accuracy with which our Heavenly Father administers the earthly discipline—in other words, that key is love.

We all of us, indeed, have seen cases which perplex us, because they seem contrary to this rule. We have seen the gentlest and the most amiable, and the purest, and as they appeared to us—the most spotless, nevertheless chastened with the heaviest afflictions and severest scourges.

But remember! that we do not know all. We only know the surface of our fellow creatures. We do not know the necessities of any person's heart. If they are indeed God's children, will they say that the remedy is too strong? I think not.

You will never take a correct estimate of life, nor understand its paradoxes, till you read it as all "discipline." See this world only revolving, as it were, within itself, and it is all mystery. But look at it as evolving another condition; view it as preliminary and preparatory to a higher existence; see it as the platform, and the machinery, and the process, by which we are taking shape and fitness for a very different state—and at once the Creator's ways are all vindicated.

This is the way, remember! the Church, the physician, or the schoolmaster, or

the parent are vindicated in their treatment ; and this is the way God is vindicated in His. They put to pain ; they impose restraints ; they require obedience which is irksome—so does He. It is discipline.

And how much does that word involve ! It is temporal ; it is prospective ; it is forethought ; it is essential ; it is tender ; and kind.

Once see it to be discipline, and it shows remembrance. Once see it to be discipline, and it shows a plan. Once see it to be discipline, and it shows a capability. Once see it to be discipline, and it shows a strength and a happiness, and a maturity, and a service, and a rest approaching.

For mark ! that all discipline, in its very nature, looks forward. Punishment deals with the past ; discipline is for the future.

Therefore go about all day, meeting everything as discipline. This will take away that miserable feeling that everything that happens is judicial for something that is past. It will send the eye onward.

Chastisement it may be for the past ; but only that it may be discipline. And discipline, that that past may not recur ; but that rather—under the transferring power of divine grace—the very element of your character that made the sin, and so drew on the suffering, may go to form a grace which shall shine in you for ever, and enable you to glorify God with better service.

St. Paul's sufferings appear to have begun at the time, when he began also to be a Christian ; and if you watch it your own observation of life will often show you the same fact.

You will see persons, so long as they are living in the world and for the world, going on their easy, and prosperous, and unruffled way. But as soon as ever they become the real children of God, and live religiously, it would seem, to an earnest observer, as if God were rather repelling than encouraging them.

Their happy circumstances are broken up ; their life is overcast ; and heavy trials come upon them. The dear one, the delight of their eyes, is taken away at a stroke ; the wheel of their hitherto good fortune is reversed, and they are plunged into difficulties. Oppositions and unkindnesses they never conceived of before spring up in their path.

And what is the solution of all this ? Rather, what is the solution of the fact, that a father does not correct a stranger's child, but his own ?

What is the solution of the fact that when the gardener goes into his garden he does not put his pruning-knife to the dead branch, but to the living and fruitful one ?

What is the solution of the fact that you do not put a stone into your crucible, but the silver and the golden ore ?

And the more that father loves his child, the more does he lay out his severest regimen to correct his faults, and to bring forth his powers.

And the more promising is the branch, the more does the dresser prune it, and the deeper does he cut it.

And the more precious is the metal, the hotter is the refiner's fire—the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold.

Therefore the discipline of life is chiefly in the Church. Do not misunderstand it ; do not stumble at it. From the moment that you give yourself to God you are "out at school" in this world, to prepare for your true home.

The discipline is strict, but for a very little time ; severe, but for a sufficient end. It will very soon be over, and you will go back to your Father's home.

For observe that word "must"—"how great things he *must* suffer for My name's sake." The disciple of the "Man of Sorrows" must be as his Master : the two natures in the heart must be separated—the one purified and the other

burnt out ; the destined companion of the saints must be meetened for that glorious fellowship ; the gem that is to be placed in the Saviour's crown must be chiselled and polished.

How these principles are carried out into the details of the discipline of life, I propose to consider on another occasion.

But be your trials what they may—the little daily droppings, or the mighty water floods—there is one thought which endears, ennobles, sweetens all—the name of Jesus is in them.

You are responsible if it is not. You may place it there, alike the lighter and the heavier grief, you may, by the spirit you throw into it, connect and identify it with Christ. You may take it from Christ, and bear it in Christ, and go through it with Christ, and come out of it to Christ.

And what is too great to bear, or do, if you can indeed add —“ for Thy name's sake ” ?

Is not love a principle, which, if you put into any cup, all the bitterness is precipitated ?

The long years of Jacob's servitude seemed to him but as a few days for the love he had to Rachel ; and the Apostles went back from their prisons and their scourgings, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

St. Paul's Baptism

BY REV. J. OSWALD DYKES, D.D.

“ Immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales,” &c.—Acts ix. 18.

Saul was still lying blind and weak upon his bed, only the tumult of a spiritual convulsion, the inner struggles of a new birth, were over ; so that he lay placid and humbled, praying not without hope. Lying thus, he was aware of some one's hands laid gently on his head, and a kindly voice just over him said : “ Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, Who appeared to thee in the way as thou camest—that thou mightest receive back sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Opening his eyes, from which it seemed to him as if scales fell at that word, they rested on the same face which he had just been contemplating in fancy in a pleasant vision that had come to him through the darkness ; and Ananias, the messenger of the Lord, was at once no stranger, but a brother, welcome as an Angel of God. The last face seen before noonday turned to midnight, had been the face of the wonderful Divine Man, Whom, in His saints, Saul had ignorantly persecuted. The first face seen, when sweet morning light revisited his eyes, was the face of one whom Jesus sent, or rather, in whom Jesus came, to save. If the Lord was present in the saints of His Church to suffer with them, and in their persons to be scourged and slain, He was no less present in His Church members to work through them, and by their words to bless with comfort and peace the penitent persecutor. At the voice of a plain disciple, otherwise unknown to history, Jesus restored sight to the eyes which alone of mortal eyes had been permitted to look upon His glory. By the hands of the same disciple, Jesus imparted the gift of the Holy Ghost to a “ chosen vessel,” Who in spiritual gifts was not to be behind the very chiefest Apostles. Ananias baptized St. Paul, as if to teach that the Church is instinct with life through all its true members, however lowly. Jesus, Who is everywhere in His body, pours His Spirit through its meanest parts. The least may be His organ of ministry to the greatest ; or rather, no instrument is little when Christ's hand wields it, nor any soul mean whom Christ inhabits.

Baptism and the communication of the Spirit through imposition of hands were the usual rites by which a new convert passed into the full fellowship of the Church ; and they meant exactly the same thing to Saul as to any other convert. He made the customary profession of faith, invoking the name of Jesus as his Lord, and received the customary seal of the forgiveness of his sins. There was only this peculiarity about the baptism of Saul, that it was administered at the express command of Jesus. In this, as in everything else connected with His Apostle's call, the Master acted throughout in person. " Though Jesus Himself baptized not—but His disciples," yet it was not on his own responsibility that Ananias ventured to number among the brethren a man who, two days before, had been their keenest foe. It was on the same warrant as Peter afterwards had to receive Cornelius—the express orders of the King. Thus, in those days, did the lately departed Chief continue to interpose His personal direction, when critical moments arrived in the administration of His young Church.

Yet while Saul's baptism meant the same as that of any other convert, it is very possible that he submitted to that solemn sacrament with a far deeper insight into its meaning than most of the early converts attained. Expressions in his letters show what importance he attached to it at a later period. If we recall the experience through which he had just been passing, it will appear that even at the time it must have come to him charged with a world of spiritual significance. That it meant the washing away of the guilt of sin was plain ; and it was a vast change for Saul the Pharisee to confess himself a guilty sinner, in need of washing. But the consciousness of sin with which Saul had been penetrated during these last three days was not by any means exhausted in the simple recognition of the fact that he, like other men, had done things which he ought not to have done. It was not just through recalling isolated actions, by which he had literally transgressed a command of God, that Saul came to feel himself guilty. To some men, whose sinning has been of another type than his, the conviction of guilt does come in this way. Flagrant misdeeds, wilful and aggravated, and blacker than the rest of life, stand up before the consciences of such men to condemn them. Saul, however, had been finding out, not so much that he had done sins, as that he was sin ; that his very nature, not at its worst, but at its best, was flesh ; that in it dwelt absolutely no good thing ; that it was impossible for it to please God ; that indeed its essence was enmity against God. He found that the more he had tried to serve God the less he had loved Him. Love alone, he now saw, could be the fulfilling of the real law, that law which is spiritual ; whereas, in all his own attempts to keep the law, there had been no touch or breath of love : only pride, and fear, and dislike. He found that the more closely he apprehended the spirit in which a true son of God must serve his Father, the more unattainable became that filial spirit ; since every attempt to drag himself, under the constraint of divine commands, to do what is commanded, only provoked him either to slavish dread or to rebellious resistance. All that was in him rose up and refused to be subject to the law of God, once it was perceived to be a law of love.

Now, where sin has been realised in this fashion as the very principle of one's unrenewed nature, nothing will satisfy the soul short of the destruction of that old man and the regeneration of a new. Propitiation through blood indeed there must be for the remission of sins that are past ; " peace through the blood of the Cross " ; and Saul was now for the first time grasping the " faithful saying " that " Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Yet even this will not meet the case unless the principle of the old life—the inward law of dislike to God and His will—be at the same time slain, and a new power of spiritual love and

childlike obedience created within the soul. This, and nothing short of this, was what Saul had begun to find in the Cross of the Nazarene. In it his sin was condemned and slain. In it the law was visibly satisfied, magnified, and abolished. In it death even was put to death, and the sinner redeemed from the curse. But more than all these, in it his own enmity against God was slain. It is impossible to dislike any more a God Who is no longer threatening or commanding on pain of death, but Who, for His great love wherewith He loved us when we were dead in sins, has died for us, to justify us freely by His grace. The old carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, cannot survive this death of the Son of God. The Cross kills it. Saul—the former carnal, self-righteous, God-disliking Saul—was crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, he lived because Christ lived. If the Cross had proved fatal to his old self-righteous life, Jesus risen became the source of a new one. He will henceforth be a limb of Jesus. He will let Jesus animate him. He will lend himself to the service, he will become the slave of Him Who loved him and gave Himself for him. He will know nothing now—do nothing—boast of nothing—but what is done in him through the Son of God, by Whom, while ignorantly persecuting Him, he has been so suddenly and marvellously snatched in over-abounding mercy from eternal death.

What a mighty revolution did it symbolise, that baptism at the hands of Ananias! From darkness to light—from death to life—from Satan to God! what words of contrast could then or afterwards describe the magnitude of a change which turned the whole nature of one of the strongest men God ever made, to run in precisely the opposite direction; which made him love with passionate devotion One Whom he had been persecuting with fiercest hate; which transformed a Pharisee into a Saint; and prepared the man who was ravaging God's flock like a bloodthirsty wolf, to become a good shepherd, willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Surely it was out of the remembrance of his own life-crisis that Paul wrote these words to Corinth: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Conversion

BY REV. C. WHITTUCK, M.A.

"Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales."—Acts ix. 18.

There are few things more striking than to see a man who has been going on in one way afterwards go on in an altogether different way. It is curious to notice what different, and even opposite, motives are commonly assigned, in order to explain cases of this kind. Whilst some are ready to believe, on the slightest possible grounds, that a real change has been made and that divine influences have been at work, others will not admit the genuineness of any conversion, no matter on the strength of what evidence. Others, again, take a middle course. According to them, the conversion is partly real, but it takes an exaggerated form, or else mixes up together things true and things false. Hence, there are those who judge of conversions favourably, and those who judge of them unfavourably, and those who regard them as being of a mixed character.

Now Scripture teaches us for the most part about conversion, by pointing to the example of those persons who have been converted. Conversion in the abstract and as a thing by itself has no place in the New Testament writings; in that sense it is an entirely modern idea. What Scripture understands by con-

version is, that a man who has been living apart from God in some manner capable of being conveyed and characterised, now becomes united with God likewise in some way capable of being conveyed and characterised. To say that such a man is converted is nothing until you fill in this merely general statement and explain in what the conversion consists. We see this even in those words of our Lord's, I mean His words addressed to St. Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." That was to be the form of St. Peter's new departure. Instead of yielding to his own weakness, which latter inclined him to constant self-assertion and overweening self-confidence, he was now upon his conversion to do what? Why, to give up all that former state, and instead of it, "to go and strengthen his brethren."

And similarly, when our Lord told Nicodemus that he must be "born again," He meant not a merely general new birth, but He meant a new birth out of some very particular state of sin into some very particular state of righteousness. Sin is in every case a most specialised, a most individualised habit of mind. No doubt every man is a sinner, and so far sin is general. But every man is a sinner in his own way and in no one else's way, and his conversion, therefore, must have reference to this fact—must take account of the ingrained character of the particular man in question, and must bring that man into a particular frame of mind and manner of life, likewise his own and no one else's, likewise in the highest degree personal and individual.

Grasp this truth and you grasp the reality of conversion, and you get rid at the same time of much mischievous wrong-headed and one-sided misconception. It is because of this misconception, because people imagine that conversion means a change from nothing particular to nothing particular, and yet a change which they none the less regard as of the most vital kind, it is because of this misconception that the possibility of conversion is apt to be denied, and that many people doubt if there is or can be any such thing. What a result that is to arrive at with regard to a doctrine which is a first principle of the Gospel, and one without which there would never have been any Gospel at all! Yet that result is the direct consequence of the vague and unmeaning talk about conversion which is so common, and, as I say, so mischievous. And this false view of the matter has another and even a worse consequence. It makes men think of their state before God as having nothing to do with their conduct, with their actions, with their modes of behaviour. A man says, "I am converted. That is quite enough. I want nothing more." Well, that again is a simple death-blow to the hopes which the Gospel encourages us to entertain, whereas if it is shown to any one that what is wanted is, that from having been such and such a man he should now become such and such another man, then he is led both to begin and to continue in the direction marked out for him under those conditions.

Let us then now look at the treatment of conversion which finds favour in the New Testament as applied to particular persons—and especially as applied to one such person, viz., St. Paul.

Do you think then it is for nothing that St. Paul's character and antecedents are so minutely recorded? Why is each little touch added to the general picture of the young man Saul's life previous to his conversion, if not to individualise the man whose conversion is about to be described? Is it merely for historical purposes that we are told of Saul's sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, and of the witnesses at the death of the martyr Stephen laying down their clothes at Saul's feet? I trow not. Surely, all this portraiture is intended to familiarise us with the man Saul as he was *before* his conversion in contrast to the same man as he was *after* his conversion. Surely, what was contemplated was that we should learn to

penetrate into the innermost mind of the great persecutor, in order that we may penetrate into the innermost mind of the great convert.

Look again at the narrative of St. Paul's conversion and you will derive from it the same impression. The whole story is throughout told in such a way as to enable us to read deep into St. Paul's life, of which this conversion was the turning-point. The words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" bring before us all the self-torture consequent upon the discovery that it was Jesus Himself, and no mere band of Christian enthusiasts, whom Saul had loaded with insults, and whom he had haled and committed to prison. Jesus had laid hold of him at the very moment that he was laying hold of those who belonged to Jesus. Not the little band whom he had helped to scatter abroad were now his accusers, but Jesus Himself, Jesus in comparison with Whose sublime sorrow all those angry and revengeful thoughts of persecution were as shame heaped on shame; in Whose loving embrace the enemies of the Cross, not less than the friends of the Crucified One, had been wrapt round in tender all-inclusive sympathy; Jesus Who had died for all men, and not least for that same Saul who was now "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."

And then the words following, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," do not they reveal the struggle which throughout had been going on in Saul's breast, though unconsciously to himself? the struggle of which Saul now for the first time became aware, but which, in the fiercest transports of his anti-Christian enthusiasm, had never allowed him one instant of real peace, the struggle against Saul's own conviction of the truth?

And then, mark the next step. Suddenly, and as in a moment, the proud man forgets his Judaism, forgets his arguments against the Christians for which he had been prepared at the feet of Gamaliel, and there follows an unconditional act of submission. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is a record of the most tremendous, the most complete, the most absolutely sincere, conversion which mortal man has ever yet experienced. And yet I ask you to observe, that it is throughout the man Saul with all his individual antecedents, with all his personal characteristics, who is the subject of this conversion. It is a man with the heart of a man, and with all the dominant associations of one who had been brought up as an orthodox Rabbi; it is such an one who is from beginning to end brought under our notice. Put aside Saul's temperament, his training, the accumulated possessions of his past life, put all that aside, and find this grand narrative down so as to make it signify only that an experience of conversion in the merely abstract and general sense has taken place, and you rob the whole story of its meaning. And you forget by so doing what a deeply human thing conversion is, a thing which goes to the roots of each individual soul, and which must be enacted in the recesses of each man's heart for himself alone.

"Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." So soon as that result was accomplished, all went well with St. Paul; so soon as that result is accomplished, all will go well with us. The Epistles of St. Paul do but exhibit to us the spiritual clearance which was gradually effected as a consequence of his enlightenment. The Epistle which, as we pass through life, is being written by each one of ourselves, must, if it is to be worth anything, advance from page to page under the influence of that same illumination, and then it will be an Epistle, "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

The New Convert

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues," &c.—Acts ix. 20-30.

I. Saul arose from his three days' fast and blindness, and received Baptism forthwith at the hands (we may suppose) of his Evangelist, the humble but faithful Ananias. His faith, however recent, was beyond question. He did believe—well might he believe—in the risen life of One Who had spoken to him by His name from Heaven. No exemption was either asked or given from the appointed mode of entrance into the Church of Christ. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; the call of Christ Himself did not supersede or modify those two conditions.

"And having received food he gained (regained) strength. And he became with," he joined the company of "the disciples at Damascus during some days. And immediately in the synagogues he began to proclaim Jesus, that He is," as being, "the Son of God." First to the Jews; first in the synagogues, to which he had brought letters of authority to persecute; must he avow his new convictions. He had a recantation to make, as well as a testimony to bear. He had to say, and it must be said publicly, "This hand hath offended." The natural character of St. Paul aided this duty. He was a man of candour; a man of honest thoughts and frank words: and therefore he goes first to those with whom his new faith will gain for him no credit and no respect. Not satisfied with making new friends, he must also explain himself to old ones: it may be that in doing this, he will win at least a few souls to Christ.

"And all who heard were amazed, and said, Is not this he who made havoc at Jerusalem of those who call on this name," the name of Jesus, "and has come hither for this purpose, that he might bring them," those who here call on this name, "bound to the chief priests? But Saul was more (increasingly) strengthened, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ"; showing, as we shall often hereafter find him, from their own Scriptures, that all the prophecies of "Him that should come" meet and have their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.

"And when many days were being fulfilled," were in course of completion, "the Jews took counsel to kill him. And their plot was learnt (discovered) by Saul. And they watched also the gates of the city, both by day and night, that they might kill him. But the disciples took him, and by night through the wall," through the window, perhaps, of a house built into or overhanging the city wall, "they let him down by lowering him in a basket."

"And on his arrival in Jerusalem, he endeavoured to join himself to the disciples; and they all feared him, as not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him," took him (as we say) by the hand, came to his aid, "and brought him to the Apostles; and related to them how on his journey he saw the Lord, and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spake and disputed with the Hellenists," the Greek-speaking Jews; "and they attempted to kill him. But the brethren, discovering it, brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus."

II. St. Paul himself adds to this brief narrative some particulars in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians.

1. He states that three years elapsed between his conversion and this first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian. The history in the Acts speaks only of "many days." But so consistent is Holy Scripture with itself, even when it appears at first sight to involve a contradiction, that we are able to show distinctly from a passage in the Old Testament that the two forms of expression are in this instance perfectly consistent. In the 2nd chapter of the 1st Book of Kings, which contains the record of the beginning of the reign of Solomon, we read that Shimei, being warned by the king not to quit the city on pain of death, "dwelt in Jerusalem many days": and then the next verse opens thus; "And it came to pass at the end of three years." The expression "many days" is large enough to cover a period of three years. So it is here. St. Luke says it was "many days" before St. Paul went to Jerusalem; and St. Paul himself tells us in one of his Epistles that it was three years. The two forms of expression are perfectly harmonious.

2. In the same Epistle St. Paul mentions a journey into Arabia, of which we have here no notice. Before he went up to Jerusalem he "went," he says, "into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." During that three years' stay in Damascus he made a journey into Arabia. The region intended is differently understood: it may have been that Arabia which borders very closely upon Damascus itself. And the purpose of his journey is not mentioned; whether it was undertaken as a first missionary enterprise, or whether (as we would rather believe) it was designed to afford him a season of secluded meditation, greatly needed both for the review of the past, and for communion with his Lord in reference to the life now before him. St. Luke leaves room, we have seen, for this journey, but does not mention it. His account of St. Paul's life is full of omissions, except during that part of it in which he was himself with him. We are thankful for what he tells; and we are glad to supplement it from other sources; from the Epistles, that is to say, of St. Paul himself.

3. Once more, the same passage of St. Paul's own writings tells us the length of his stay at Jerusalem on this occasion, and with which of the Apostles he then became acquainted. "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lie not." Why this earnestness of expression? Because St. Paul is vindicating in that passage the independence of his own Apostleship. He did not receive his Gospel at second hand: he was taught it by the Lord Himself. Doubtless, in the seclusion of his Arabian retirement, he was enlightened by direct communications of his Master's mind and will. It was three years before he saw one of the Apostles: when he at length visited Jerusalem, it was but for fifteen days, and during the whole of that visit he saw but Peter and James the Lord's brother. Thus were the words verified, "Paul an Apostle, not of men, neither by man," &c.

III. The verses which form our text this evening must leave something behind them. God grant it!

1. We are told what St. Paul's subject was from the first day of his ministry. "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." "We preach not ourselves," he said some years afterwards, "but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." "Christ our Subject"; that ought to be the motto of all preachers. St. Paul never found it necessary to change his subject. It lasted him for his life. But what was it in his hands, on his lips? Was it the dry monotonous repetition of one doctrine—of the truth of the Atonement through the one Sacrifice? Was his preaching the perpetual harping upon one string, without variety and without life? Need I ask this

question of any reader of his Epistles ? Well may he speak there of "the unsearchable riches of Christ"; of "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ bodily." He found it so, evidently, to himself. He found in Christ an inexhaustible wealth of comfort, of sympathy, of help, of strength : an absolutely unlimited supply of grace in the present, and of hope for the longest future. And this was what he sought to communicate.

2. In its simple fact he could do this at once : he could "straightway preach Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God." He could tell, as a matter of plain proof, of direct evidence, that he, he himself, who had come out on this occasion to persecute and to destroy, had been arrested by a stronger hand as he approached the city, and constrained to confess that One Whom he had scouted as a crucified and dead man was indeed living in the fulness of strength at the Right Hand of God in Heaven. But we are not therefore to suppose that St. Paul's knowledge was at once complete, or his spiritual life perfected. We read in the Gospel history, in a higher example still, the need of delay and of preparation before the exercise of a sacred calling. And we attach, in this respect, great value to that addition which St. Paul himself makes to the narrative as here written ; namely, his journey into Arabia, and the interval of three years between his conversion and his return to Jerusalem. Doubtless it was during this interval that he both learned and suffered many of those things of which he has left the record in his Epistles. Many of those "revelations of the Lord," of which he there speaks as made personally to himself, were no doubt communicated then. And may it not have been, that that deep experience of the conflict with indwelling sin, which he details so strikingly in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, was then especially gained ? It is a great error, and one pregnant with mischief, to suppose that an Apostle, because he was specially called, and specially equipped for his high office, was therefore raised out of the ordinary experiences of the Christian life within ; was exempted from the trials, and excused the struggles, which other men endure in rising from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. This notion deprives us of more than half of the comfort and benefit to be derived from their words and from their history. They are no longer men of flesh and blood, men of like passions with us, able to feel with us in our sorrows, and in the same degree to encourage us by their victory. And the same error runs on into a province in which it is not a mere loss of comfort, but a grave and sometimes fatal deception. Men talk as if conversion were the whole of a Christian life ; as if a person, brought to see the guilt and the sin of his doings, and to seek forgiveness and cleansing in the blood of Christ, were thenceforth not only safe from condemnation but secure from sin ; called not only to trust but to rest ; not only to look to Christ for all, but even to dispense with that looking. We all know what has again and again come of this ; in the sincere and honest-hearted, distress, disappointment, and perhaps despair ; in the less scrupulous, carelessness, presumption, at last a hardened heart and a seared conscience. Conversion is a great thing ; God's best gift to His sinful creatures ; but let conversion itself be tried by these tests : first, is it the commencement of a change ? and secondly, is it the commencement of a progress ?

3. How life-like are the lessons of Scripture ! Which of us cannot understand that shrinking (of which the text tells) from the new convert, in the recollection of his former deeds ? "He assayed to join himself to the disciples" : he felt himself, in heart and soul, one with them ; he longed to exchange with them that sympathy which only Christians know, and which it is misery to them to be constrained to hide ; he longed, too, to tell them his bitter self-reproaches for injuries once done to them, and to speak of that longsuffering love of Christ which had

spared and sought out and reconciled even him, the blasphemer and the persecutor, yea (in his own judgment at least) the very chief of sinners. "But they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." It was natural: the memory of their beloved Stephen at whose cruel death this man had assisted, and of many others, hunted down by his relentless rage against the Gospel, and compelled or at least tempted to blaspheme, could not but rise within them at the sight of him, and make it difficult to believe that the professed change was real. This was the punishment of long hostility to the truth and to the Saviour. Doubtless he bore it meekly: doubtless he confessed that it was his due. But ought not the record of that suspicion, of that coldness towards a holy and blessed saint on the ground of what he once was, to make us all fearful of discouraging and daunting the nascent faith of others? Let me speak plainly: and let me speak especially to the young. Some of you are thrown together in large bodies; associated in trade or manufacture, where there is sometimes no eye over you to check the freest expression of thought and feeling: and you know that in these days more especially, such freedom is sure to run on into licence; you hear things said against Christ and against God's Word, which are deeply painful to the believing: and you have found by experience that argument on such subjects seldom succeeds in convincing, and more often tends to provoke to more ungodliness: you have learned therefore to keep silence: to preserve your opinion and your faith by meditation rather than by controversy: and amongst other securities against being shaken in your religion, you have adopted that of considerable isolation; you keep to yourselves, you avoid needless communication, you repel the advances of unbelieving or doubtful men. It is hard to blame you. You have a difficult and trying part to play: God help you to play it well and wisely! But remember one thing: there may be amongst you, though you know it not, men whose minds are more than half open to a better influence; men who through weakness only, not from deliberate choice of evil, are falling into the snare of the devil: men who whatever they may say or not say in the company of the wicked, have yet a misgiving in their hearts as to the life they lead, and an openness to conviction as to the very truth with which they trifle. Take heed not to "quench the smoking flax" by your treatment of such a condition. Take heed not to be blind and not to be indifferent to the existence of such cases. If not yet disciples, these men are at least among those for whom Christ died: they have a claim therefore upon your assistance in turning to Him: and it would be a cruel selfishness if you allowed them to fall utterly from Him, from a fear lest perhaps they should hinder or disress you in your own faith and service.

4. Take then to your heart the example here presented of the conduct of the faithful Barnabas towards a still mistrusted disciple. We heard of him in an earlier chapter as receiving his name from the Apostles, in token, no doubt, of something in his character which suited the title of "a son of consolation." How well does he here justify that appellation! We know not whether he was previously acquainted with him whom he here befriends. Saul was of Tarsus in Cilicia, and Barnabas of the not very distant island of Cyprus; so that there may have existed some such earlier intimacy, as should explain the one acting (on two occasions in this history) as the helper and introducer of the other. But this we know, that Barnabas was a Christian man: he had drunk deeply of that Holy Spirit Which is love, long-suffering, goodness, as well as peace and joy and gentleness. He knew the whole history of the new disciple: he knew how he had seen the Lord in the way, and how the Lord had spoken to him, and how Saul had at once avowed boldly the strength and certainty of his new convictions. And therefore he lost no time in mediating between him and those who doubted him.

He brought him to the Apostles, and declared to them his history. Thus, like one of the original Apostles, St. Andrew, he acted as the encourager and the helper of another in coming to Jesus. It is a blessed office, my brethren, this of the peacemaker ; more especially when the peace made is not of earth only ; when it affects the soul also, whether in its dealings with Christ Himself, or in its relations to Christ's servants. I could desire nothing better for one of those whose present difficulties I have been describing, than that he might be the means of clearing the path for another, weaker perhaps and less resolute than himself, towards Christ and towards Heaven. "Look not every man," in this sense, "on his own things : but every man also on the things of others."

And is not this, my brethren, the very office of some of those who hear ? What is the aim of a Visitor of the poor, in its highest aspect ? Is it not this—to "bring to the Apostles"—in other words, to bring to Christ Himself—those who, but for such aid, might be lost sight of, might be left in disregard, in suspicion, in darkness ? How often has the work of Christian charity been privileged to perform this highest office ! How often has the ministry of the body gone on, under God's blessing, to be a ministry of the soul ! Many a man has been first drawn to Jesus by finding himself cared for, in bodily things, by one on whom he felt himself to have no claim ; by one whose service to him he saw to be wholly disinterested, wholly prompted by Christian love. God has knit together in a wonderful manner His various gifts of grace. He puts it into the heart of a Christian man or a Christian woman to undertake this ministry to the poor. He leads others to give of their abundance, that the hand of the visitant may not be empty. He guides the steps to some poor man's home, where there is one who deems himself forsaken, and has begun to acquiesce in that neglect which is nevertheless paralyzing to the soul. In the surprise of this new solicitude he begins to ask himself what is this motive which has wrought in a stranger's heart to do him this service. And he can assign no reason for it but this only ; that there is a power in Christ's Gospel, which is mighty to overcome sloth and self, and to seek out, in the Saviour's name, those who were lost and sunk in sin. Then the heart is opened to attend to the things spoken, and the sleeping soul awakened from the fatal lethargy which bound it. This has been : God grant it may yet again be amongst us ! A Christian care for the body may be made available to save the soul. It is thus that God's works are wrought below. It is thus that His grace penetrates into new homes, making men's hearts "willing in the day of His power." In every such sowing, beloved brethren, expect the reaping ; and pray, as you give, that the highest of all blessings may accompany your offering, guiding it not only to the healing of the body but to the saving of the soul !

Straightway

BY REV. A. RALEIGH, D.D.

"Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues," &c.—Acts ix. 20.

Promptly and without delay Paul began to preach. He was a man whose heart would be always telling him that he must influence men, that he must preach *something*. Now the matter is settled ; he must preach Christ, and he begins to do it "*straightway*." Like David, he "madchaste and delayed not" to keep this commandment. This quality of *promptitude*, standing where it does in the Apostle's life—at the beginning of the new course, and for the carrying out of the new convictions—has much instruction for u/

There are many beginnings in the world which stand alone, or which shine out in mocking contrast to all that comes after. Many a rosy morning becomes a cloudy noon, precursor of a stormy night ! Many a man who starts in life well, swerves and wavers as he goes on. In civil society and in mercantile life you hear the question, "How is he standing?" although the first start may have been good and full of promise. The divine life has to our eyes the same uncertainties about it. You cannot absolutely predicate ultimate results. God can do this, but such knowledge is not ours. However bright and clear the change, however favourable the conditions and auspices, we cannot say in any one case, "Here is everlasting salvation achieved." We have to wait for proof, for the fruits the years will bring, for patient continuance to the end. Yet in some beginnings we can see conditions and causes which, continued, have led from strength to strength, and at last to a prosperous and triumphant issue. One of these, very prominent in the history of St. Paul, is this quality of promptitude.

Promptitude is a pre-requisite and essential element of success. A beginning, we have said, is only a beginning, and yet much depends on how it is made. Some beginnings are like the spring on the mountain-side, gushing into life and flowing clearly; some are like waters from a mossy soil, trickling, oozing, so little visible and so uncertain, that you cannot tell where they begin. But here is a vigorous, clear beginning: here is the saliency of a new life. "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that He is the Son of God." Apparently Paul did this from the impulse of his own mind, under the influence of the Spirit of God. As soon as he saw his duty he did it. "What wilt Thou have me to do?" had been his prayer. "*Do this*," is the answer. "Preach Christ. You know Me now, Who I am, what I have been to you. You have persecuted—now preach"; and he did so "straightway." In giving the history of this very time, Paul himself tells us in the Epistle to the Galatians that he did not ask counsel of men; "but," says he, "when it pleased God, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." If he had so conferred, if he had taken advice from friends or fellow-Christians, or from those who were Apostles before Him—Peter, James, or John at Jerusalem—it is almost certain that his whole course would have been different. Some would have said: "Stay awhile; keep in quietness until the memory of your career as persecutor has somewhat died away." Others would have said: "Be cautious. Do not commit yourself thus early. You may repent it in a while if you do. Your present convictions may be only transient. What seems a deep life-purpose may be no more than a passing emotion. It can do no harm to wait." Suppose he had sent or gone to Jerusalem to consult with the Apostles, what would Peter have said? He who said to the Master, "Not so, Lord," would have been quite as ready to say "*Not so*" to the servant. Not Peter alone, but probably all the Apostles, would have advised caution: "Come up hither, and wait on us awhile, and make proof of your Apostleship; let your faith be stronger. Do not begin to preach yet, especially not in Damascus." In short, there is not the least likelihood that a consultation with flesh and blood would have put into Paul's history that one word which stands so conspicuously at the beginning of it, "*straightway*."

It was very important that that word should be there, representative of the quality of promptitude which it expresses. That promptitude saved him from many difficulties which else would have beset his course. It raised his conversion above suspicion. It opened his way. It confirmed his faith. It enlarged his knowledge. It gave him an advantage against any who might be his enemies.

It put him in possession of the ground. It made retreat more difficult. It made him a fit example for all who are beginning the Christian course to the end of time. That word will be needed so long as there are beginnings in the Christian life. The first sign of a rectified condition will always be the prayer, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The next will be to do it "straightway."

The thing to be done will, of course, be different in different cases. Comparatively few are required to devote their lives to the preaching of the Gospel. But every one who receives it must live according to its laws, must breathe its spirit, and must seek its extension. In a sense every one who receives the Gospel must preach it. There will be *something* to be done, which is as much in relation to the past life and present circumstances of that individual, as preaching Christ in the synagogues of Damascus was in relation to the character and career of Saul of Tarsus. Nothing less than preaching would have sufficed for him—open, fearless, earnest preaching of Christ—because he had been open, fearless, and earnest in striving against Christ. He felt that he must undo and unsay all that, in so far as he could, and that it could only be undone and unsaid by as much openness and publicity on the right side as formerly he had shown on the wrong. Anyone now, speaking or writing against the Christian cause, on coming to a better mind would require to do just as the Apostle did, to stand out and say or write, "I am for Christ now," and to do this promptly with no delay. There are some who favour the doctrine of reserve in regard to religious feeling and conviction. It is thought to be right that a man—even one who assumes the position of a literary teacher, who is accustomed to think and to express his thoughts—should keep comparative silence through his whole life on the question of personal religion. He may have reverence, and godly fear, and the love of Christ, and the faith of His Gospel, and yet never give full and frank expression to these. It is said that such things ought to be felt rather than expressed. That is not the teaching of the Bible. "We believe and therefore speak." "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." "I said I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." "Ye shall be witnesses"—not *silent* witnesses surely—"unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Such was the original law, and there is no reason to believe that it has ever been changed. Why is religion *now* to be only a thing of reserve? Why are the men who can speak best on such a subject to speak least? Why are those who are always writing, never to write the thing they consider truest (supposing them to be Christians), never to speak out the things that are holier, dearer, more important than all else in their esteem? Because some others say too much must they say nothing? Does one extreme not only cause, but justify and require the opposite? Because thoughtless people sometimes talk not wisely and not well on religion, must thoughtful people seal their tongues in silence and keep all dark till the day of death? Let there be no expression of what is not believed and not felt. But if the scales have fallen; if the light has come; if a spiritual baptism has filled and purified and freshened the soul; if there is an open path Heavenward, surely there ought not to be a life-long silence, or even a habit of stopping suddenly, in the expression of religious truth or emotion. A far nobler habit is that of which we have the example in him who "*straightway*" made known his faith, and preached the Saviour Who had found him.

If this principle be true, it is applicable all down the scale; not to great men only, but to every man. Each man ought, in his own measure and in his own way, to do the like. For a quiet man to speak in conversation is as much as for a

public man to write. For one man to offer prayer in a house would be more than for another to preach in a pulpit. Or with some, a change of habit and life may be the most expressive thing they can say or do. The question as to the form which the duty of the new state shall take is a question which one can never settle for another. But the principle is this—that there is to every one *something* to be done, by look, or speech, or action, or habit—or all of these together—to be done for Christ as soon as you believe in Him; and that that thing ought to be done without delay. “Straightway” do what thy hand findeth to do! It may be less or more. It may be in public or in private. It may be a thing or a course that may be commented on by others, or that will be passed over in silence. These are minor matters. The principle is that when the light comes it is to be followed. When the sense of duty is felt, it is as sacred to the soul as the voice of God. It is the voice of God—it is heard only to be obeyed.

The Conversion of St. Paul

BY RIGHT REV. HENRY PHILLPOTTS, D.D.

“*All that heard him were amazed,*” &c.—Acts ix. 21.

The Conversion of St. Paul is one of the most remarkable events in the history of our Religion; and accordingly it is related by St. Luke (the author of this book) no less than three times: first, in the chapter whence my text is taken, where it is presented to us in the regular course of the sacred historian’s narrative; and twice in St. Paul’s different justifications of himself, before the Jewish multitude at Jerusalem, and before Agrippa and Festus at Cæsarea.

The circumstances of the case were, indeed, most striking. Saul, who, though born in the province of Cilicia, was yet a Jew of the purest descent, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews,” without any admixture of Gentile blood; sprung from parents so devoted to the religion of their ancestors, that they sent their son in his earliest youth from a distant province, to be brought up in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel,” the most celebrated doctor of the law; this Saul, who had thus imbibed all the prejudices of his nation from his birth, and had been confirmed in them by education, who, as was well known to the Jews, had, “after the most straitest sect of their religion, lived a Pharisee,” who had been eminently zealous among the most zealous of his countrymen, for the law of Moses, in opposition to the Gospel; who had testified this zeal even to fury, by consenting to, and promoting, the murder of the first Christian martyr St. Stephen, by joining in every act of violence against the professors of the new doctrine, by even volunteering his services on an especial mission from Jerusalem to Damascus, for the sole purpose of searching out and dragging to punishment fresh victims of the cruel bigotry of himself and his associates; this man, “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” was suddenly converted by a miraculous appearance to him on his road, and became the warmest and most active minister of the Religion of Christ Jesus. So remarkable an event may well be repeatedly referred to in the sacred volume; nor can a more interesting subject be proposed for our meditation.

I. We cannot but be struck with the strong testimony which is afforded by it to the truth of our Religion.

To feel the full value of this testimony, it is necessary to bear in mind that the book which contains it professes to be a continuation of St. Luke’s Gospel;

and as it is cited by writers of the very age of the Apostles, there can be no controversy that, by whomsoever written, it was published at that time. But if published then, it must be admitted to give a true account of those circumstances of St. Paul's public life which preceded his conversion. No writer would have dared to publish, in the face of all the world, and in the very age in which the facts of the case occurred, a false account of such facts. That Paul had been distinguished by his zeal in persecuting the Christians, that he had been publicly employed and authorized by the rulers of the Jews to act in that very business, for them and in their name, must be taken as certain, if we are willing to ascribe common sense to the first narratives of the Christian story. For most assuredly, no person of common sense, if he wished his story to be believed, would embarrass it with a false account of facts, which were notorious to every one, and by even appealing for the truth of that account, as is done in the words of my text, to the very bitterest enemies of the Christian name. But taking these previous circumstances of St. Paul's life to be true, the truth of the whole Christian story which Paul preached, follows, from the very fact of his conversion. For, in this case, the sincerity of Paul's conversion, and subsequent preaching, is placed above all question. Nothing but a sincere, pure, and firm conviction of the truth of Christianity, could have produced so great and durable a change in the sentiments and conduct of St. Paul. If he were insincere, no human principle of action can be even devised, to account for his behaviour, whatever may be devised or imagined in respect to others. For Paul, the persecutor, to become the fervent advocate and preacher of the Christian faith, implied the sacrifice of every worldly object that is most dear to man—the abandonment of his friends and relatives, the destruction of his temporal fortunes, the loss of that wealth and honour, which could not fail to follow the zealous partisan of a cause in which all the interests and passions of the rulers of his nation were most deeply engaged—above all, it involved an acknowledgment more grating and more difficult than any sacrifice; an acknowledgment, that all the fancied merits, on which he had prided himself, his zeal and labours for that ceremonial law, which he had been taught to regard with the highest veneration, were founded on error, nay, were most guilty, most pernicious—that, instead of arraying him in a garb of more than common sanctity, they made him to be in truth “the chief of sinners.” Of his sincerity, therefore, there cannot be, nor did any of us ever hear of, a shadow of suspicion.

But could he have been deceived?—for if he were, it would be of little moment to us that his testimony and conduct were sincere. Now, on this point, the answer is no less complete than on the former. At noon-day (a time of all others the least obnoxious to illusions of vision), as he was journeying with several attendants, a supernatural light from Heaven, exceeding the brightness of the sun, suddenly burst upon their sight. The men which were with him stood speechless; they heard a voice, but they saw no man. Paul, meanwhile, both saw the wonderful effusion of light, which had betokened the peculiar presence of the Godhead, and he, moreover, heard himself addressed from the midst of this glorious radiance. The effect of the vision on his bodily organs was, we know, a blindness of three days' continuance: and this is undeniably a proof of something real.

But it has been objected that Paul's temporary blindness may have been caused by lightning, and that the other particulars of the vision and the voice may have been only the creation of his fancy, strongly worked upon by the singularity of the incident, and by the peculiar circumstances of his mission. This, I say, has been objected; but to it we answer that imagination cannot account for the remarkable coincidence of facts, which concurred with, and followed, the vision. Not only did Paul hear a positive command to him from Heaven to go

into Damascus, and there expect further directions for his conduct ; but when he was in Damascus, a man, named Ananias, personally unknown to Paul, one who had heard of him only as a persecutor, he also saw a vision, in which he was commanded to go to a particular house in a particular street, in which he should find this Paul expecting him, and prepared to receive, by the imposition of his hand, recovery from his blindness. He went as he was commanded, and found Paul accordingly. Now can we believe it possible that the concurrence of these two visions to two different persons, strangers to each other, could be the result of mere imagination in both of them ? Is it ever known, or can it be conceived, that the illusions of two distempered brains do thus coincide by chance ? It is incredible.

But even if this obstacle in the way of infidelity were removed, if it were said that the vision of Ananias, of which no other evidence is given than the word of himself, or of the writer who records it, deserves no credit, there remains another difficulty still more insurmountable. For if Paul's vision was an illusion, and that of Ananias an imposture, how are we to account for the recovery of Paul's sight ? This certainly was no illusion. He had been blind three days, and now recovered his sight exactly as Ananias said that he had been told, in his vision, that he should recover it.

These wonderful coincidences prove that Paul was not deceived himself, and as we have already seen, that he could have no design to deceive others, it follows that his conversion was caused by real and substantial facts ; but if so, it further follows, that the religion to which he was converted by so manifest a miracle, proceeded from that Almighty Being, Who alone appointed, and Who alone can change the course of nature ; and therefore that it is true.

II. The conversion of St. Paul is the one case which is most frequently adduced, in proof of the entire and sole agency of God, without any co-operation of man, in the great work of our conversion. It is triumphantly argued that as St. Paul was, on the sudden, and without previous thought or preparation on his part, called from a state of spiritual darkness and wickedness to light and holiness, so must the change which is wrought in the hearts of other men be brought about solely by the Holy Spirit, without any effort, exertion, or care on their parts.

Now, although it would by no means follow, that because God may have seen fit, for special purposes, to bring about the conversion of one man solely by his own irresistible grace, therefore He does so in all other cases (for it would be equally reasonable to contend that, because a miracle was wrought to convert Paul, therefore no one else is converted, unless a miracle be wrought for the purpose) ; yet it is not necessary to have recourse to this mode of argument. We may fairly deny the assertion that Paul's conversion was wrought by any irresistible grace—in such a sense, at least, irresistible, as to exclude the co-operation of his own will. So far otherwise, that the whole narrative of St. Luke seems to recognise the possibility of Paul's resisting the great grace of God thus wonderfully vouchsafed to him. The awful address of the Blessed Jesus to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ?” and “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,” seems to proceed in the way of most merciful indeed, and most convincing, but still of rational persuasion. It does not exclude the notion that Paul might (like so many other sinners of his own age, and unhappily so many sinners of every age) “kick against the pricks” ; in other words, strive against that Almighty power, which his utmost opposition could not hurt, but which, by being opposed, would not fail to work the perdition of him who opposed it.

Again, the inquiry of the trembling and astonished Paul himself, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?” and our Lord's answer, “Arise, and go into the city,

and it shall be told thee what thou must do," appear to lead to the same conclusion that Paul was under no irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit.

And this seems to be yet more manifest from the words of Paul himself, in the 26th chapter, speaking of this very matter: "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision": for, surely, this would be a strange mode of speaking in any one if he was under such spiritual constraint, that he had it not in his power to disobey, or do otherwise than the heavenly wisdom had enjoined. But strange as it would be in any one, strange would it have been, beyond all power of estimating its strangeness, in St. Paul, a preacher of Christian truth if the irresistibility of grace were indeed a special particular of that truth which he was to preach; a particular which some persons claim to discover distinctly set forth, and insisted on, by him, in other parts of his preaching.

At any rate, whatever was the force of that grace which had "called him out of darkness into God's marvellous light," we know, if plain words have a plain meaning, that St. Paul himself considered it not as securing him from falling, for he tells us expressly that he "kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest that by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away."

The doctrine of irresistible grace, as a practical doctrine, therefore, we may fairly contend, has no support from this case of St. Paul.

III. As little can another kindred notion, that of the small efficacy of the outward means of grace, particularly of Baptism, derive any confirmation from the instance before us. It has been said, in our own times, by some who are not disposed to attribute to the Sacrament of Baptism all the importance which Christians in general, the Liturgy of our own Church, in particular, and, as we conceive, the plain words of Scripture, ascribe to it, namely, that it is to those who receive it rightly, the means, and the only appointed means, of conveying the grace of regeneration, or the new birth; it has been said that the instance of St. Paul shows that regeneration is independent of Baptism, for that, in his case, it preceded Baptism.

This, however, is said entirely without proof. That Paul had really a new birth unto righteousness—that he was become no longer a child of wrath, but a child of God, before his baptism, by no means appears from anything stated in Scripture. It does indeed appear that he had (as, we doubt not, adult receivers of the inward grace of baptism always have) some preventing grace—grace going beforehand, calling him to believe in Christ; but that he was yet accepted, that his sins were pardoned, that the abiding Grace of the Holy Spirit, "sealing him unto the day of redemption," was yet vouchsafed to him, is so far from being asserted, that the very contrary seems to be implied in Ananias's address to him, as given both in the chapter from which my text is taken and in the 22nd of this same book. In the former Ananias is represented as saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost": "and (it follows) he received sight forthwith, and was baptized": apparently implying that it was in baptism, the latter part of Ananias's promise, that he should "be filled with the Holy Ghost," was fulfilled; at least, it is manifest that he was not "filled with the Holy Ghost" before. And, indeed, it has been, on good grounds, supposed that St. Paul, in his Epistle to Titus, must be understood as speaking of his own baptism, when he calls it "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Again, in the 22nd chapter, Ananias's address is given somewhat differently: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Here the

remission of sins is referred to baptism, as, in the former chapter, was the gift of the Holy Ghost ; and, coupling the two together, we have a complete recognition, even in the case of St. Paul himself, both of the necessity and of the full efficacy of this sacrament, in which all right receivers are " born again of water and of the Spirit."

IV. But to pass from these doctrinal matters to a consideration more nearly connected with practice.

St. Paul's behaviour before his conversion is the very common case of a person's sinning in ignorance of his guilt. Yet he speaks of it himself in strong terms of reprehension ; he says that he " was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," offending alike against God and man ; but he adds, " I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Now are we to understand from this that all sins committed in ignorance will also be pardoned ? Certainly not. But if we are not, what were the peculiar circumstances which distinguished the case of St. Paul from those of other men ?

1. In the first place, there was (as I before said) the most indisputable sincerity in St. Paul : he had no notion, so suspicion whatever, that he was doing wrong. And this is very rarely true, to the full extent, of persons who are sinning ignorantly. Their ignorance is seldom so complete, as not to be accompanied with some secret doubt and misgiving that all is not as it should be. Sins done in ignorance are commonly done with a determination not to inquire whether they are sins or not. Too often those who commit them " will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd."

2. But, secondly, St. Paul was not only sincere, but he had also a fervent desire to advance the glory of God in what he did. He could truly say of himself that he was " zealous towards God."

But here it may be said, " So are persecutors in general ; so are the Spanish inquisitors ; they are zealous toward God, and are sincere in their conduct : and yet neither their zeal nor their sincerity prevents us from considering them among the most wicked of men. How was St. Paul better than they ? " In this most material circumstance—that supposing the *facts of the case* to have been what he believed them to be—the *facts* of the case, I say—he would have been acting in strict conformity to the laws of God and man. The law of Moses (which he knew on the best grounds was given by God Himself) ordained that all false prophets, all seducers of the people from the true to a false Religion, were to be put to death. If, therefore, Jesus were (as Paul believed) a false prophet, both He, and the Apostles who preached His word, would, by the law of Moses—in other words by the law of God, and the law of their country—have incurred that punishment which Paul sought to bring upon them.

3. But is the case of persecution the same under the Gospel ? Does it not, on the contrary, violate the whole spirit and tenour of the law of Christ ? And can they who profess to be followers of Christ, and yet persecute their neighbour for not believing as they believe, be really, unless wilfully, blind to the sinfulness of such conduct ? Let this, then, be a third distinction in St. Paul's case. He sinned from ignorance of a *fact*, not of a rule of conduct. Now, ignorance of a *fact* is often hard to be avoided ; and when it is so, it carries with it much excuse for the misconduct which it occasions ; but most men's sins of ignorance are committed in ignorance of the *rule* ; and yet, under the Gospel, it is not easy for any man, on any occasion, to be ignorant of the proper rule of conduct, without much of negligent, if not wilful, disregard of the plain words of Scripture.

4. If it be said that the distinction here made applies also to the high priests and rulers who caused our Blessed Lord to be put to an ignominious death—

for their sin was committed in ignorance of the *fact*—they knew not that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God—I answer that it does indeed apply to them; but there is another distinction yet behind, which separates their case very widely from that of St. Paul. To them the most powerful and convincing evidence of this great truth was proposed, and proposed in vain. In their streets, and before their very eyes, lepers were cleansed, the blind received their sight, the lame were made to walk, the deaf to hear, even the dead were raised again to life by the power of the Blessed Jesus: still more, in conjunction with His mighty works, they witnessed His Godlike demeanour; they heard Him “speak as never man spake”; they were at times cut even to the very heart by that “word of His, which was sharper than any two-edged sword”; yet they rejected Him. They listened to every base suggestion of envy, avarice, disappointed ambition, above all, of spiritual pride, and thus hardened themselves against the force of that evidence, which no ingenuous, no honest inquirer could resist. So did not St. Paul. He had not an evil *heart of unbelief*. He was not influenced by interest, or spleen, or obstinacy, or malice. The first time (so far as we are told) that he saw or heard the Blessed Jesus was when He appeared to him in the clouds of Heaven, and addressed him in the tone of merciful expostulation; the only miracle which he is recorded to have witnessed was that which prostrated him, at once, in humble and fervent adoration, before the Saviour Whom he had despised and persecuted. This, then, his fairness and openness to conviction, this freedom from all base and selfish motives, formed the grand distinction of St. Paul’s case, and made him meet, through the mercy of God, to receive that heavenly grace which enabled him to believe, and not only sealed his pardon, but raised him, ere long, to the highest eminence among the preachers of “that faith which he once destroyed.”

Well, then, may we, as the Churches of Judæa did, “glorify God in him.” May the example of his guileless probity, his teachable and willing mind, his submission to the truth, when once sufficiently made known to him, his readiness to confess and retract his error—his deep, and heartfelt, and abiding humility and contrition under the conviction of his past sins—last, may his earnestness to approve the sincerity of his repentance by zeal in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of men—may they have their due effect on us, and on all whom the knowledge of his edifying history shall ever reach! So shall we also *obtain mercy*, and an inheritance with him and all the saints in glory!

Saul’s First Experiences as a Christian

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

“*But Saul increased the more in strength,*” &c.—*Acts ix. 22-31.*

“Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.” After the great change, he did not immediately go either to Jerusalem or to Tarsus, his home. He was not yet ready to begin his mission to the Gentiles. He was, as yet, a novice; and in his own experience he first learned the rule which he afterwards prescribed, to “lay hands suddenly on no man” for ordination to the public ministry of the Gospel.

“Straightway,” however, it is added, “he preached Christ in the synagogues” of the city where he happened to reside. As one who had received mercy, he instantly began to make it known; but this is not yet the exercise of his apostolic office. It is the witnessing of a convert, on the method practised by David the king. I should not expect much from a missionary or a minister after he had

completed his preparation and been ordained to his office, if he had not in the course of his preparation sought and found opportunities of bearing witness for Christ.

The old proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was revived with a new meaning and greater power. "All that heard it were amazed," and well they might. No such contrast had ever occurred in the memory of the people—no such contrast has ever been presented in the history of the Church. Already the conversion of Saul began to be felt as an evidence of Christianity. In this aspect it is a great study, and has been of late years presented with great variety of learning and skill. The more that you examine the facts, the more you are shut up to the conclusion that all suppositions fail except one—that Christ appeared to Saul in the way, and turned the heart of the man like a river of water, so that the whole volume of his life thenceforth flowed in a new channel and to an opposite sea.

If Saul was not true, he must have been either *deceived* or a *deceiver*; he must have been either a fanatic believing his own error, or a deep schemer, consciously cheating his contemporaries by an elaborate tissue of falsehoods. If you suppose that he was himself deceived, what fanatic ever exhibited the calmness, constancy, wisdom, and humility of this man, through a long and extremely active life, in contact with all classes of men, with mobs and with statesmen, and profoundly influencing all? To believe that such a life had no other origin and support than the whim of an enthusiast, is intellectually harder than to believe that it sprang from his meeting with the Lord.

If, on the other hand, you suppose him a deceiver, where shall you find a motive? He renounced place, and power, and honour. He attached himself to a small, despised, and persecuted sect: he suffered the loss of all things that he might win Christ for himself, and preach Him to others. This supposition is contrary to nature—contrary to universal law. The conversion, and life, and ministry of Paul constitute a strong pillar, raised by the hand of the King in the mid-stream of human life, that mightily helps to make fast a disciple's faith, when the currents of time threaten to carry it away. He hath done all things well. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!"

From the simplest testimony of the new-born to the fact of his regeneration, the word of the convert increased in power until it silenced all his adversaries. "Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." But the unbelieving Jews, true to their character, raised a persecution against him. They could not, indeed, withstand this witness in argument: but they could kill him. Already he began to suffer what he had formerly inflicted. He saw clearly that this would be his experience to the end of his course, yet he never wavered. He had counted the cost.

Somewhere in the interval between his conversion and his final escape from Damascus the sojourn in Arabia probably took place (Gal. 1. 17). Arabia, like Asia, is a very indefinite term in ancient geography. It indicates sometimes a larger and sometimes a smaller district of the same region. Whether Paul retired to the desert which lay close by Damascus, or went into the region of which Petra was the capital, or penetrated into the Sinaitic peninsula, we cannot ascertain.

Nor are we informed of his occupation there. Probably he did not go thither to preach, like Philip, even to a single seeking soul. The object more probably was retirement, with such inner exercise of spirit as might qualify him better for his subsequent work. Here he was physically as well as spiritually in the track of Moses, and in the track of a greater than Moses. There seems to be some

mysterious necessity that one who is commissioned to lead a great exodus, should be trained beforehand in a solitude.

The length of this sojourn in Arabia is also left uncertain. His residence in the city immediately after his conversion, the sojourn in the wilderness, and his subsequent abode in Damascus occupied three years in all. The Jewish authorities had time to recover from their consternation, and now they took courage to resume the offensive. They took counsel to kill him ; but he found the means of escape, and returned to Jerusalem.

At Jerusalem, Saul sought the society of the disciples of Jesus ; but they feared a plot, and kept out of his way. No wonder that they feared him. The flock had suffered by the wolf, and they could not easily believe that the creature's nature had been completely changed. Here Barnabas appears in his proper character as a son of consolation. Knowing the history of the case, he took the convert under his protection and obtained for him a welcome into the bosom of the Church. Again the convert preached with power, and again the power of his preaching excited the enmity of the Jews. When his life was a second time exposed to danger the brethren withdrew him to the sea-coast at Cæsarea, and thence sent him to Tarsus that he might be beyond the reach of his persevering persecutors.

Then had the Churches rest. At first they were troubled by Saul persecuting, and next they were troubled by Saul being persecuted ; but now that the greatest enemy had been subdued, and the most obnoxious Christian sent into Asia, there was a lull in the storm, and the Christians obtained an opportunity of consolidating their infant society. They used their opportunity well ; for " they were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." When they obtained relief from external persecution, they became spiritually prosperous. They grew in numbers and in grace. We are accustomed to think that a time of suffering is the most likely to be a time of reviving, either in the private experience of a Christian, or the public experience of the Church. This may be true in point of fact ; but it would be a great mistake to suppose that a state of suffering is in its own nature better fitted to edify the body of Christ than a state of peace. Severe trouble tends to crush the spirit ; and when deliverance comes, there is liberty if there be a will to run in the way of the Lord's commandments. The time of health and prosperity is a better time for growth in grace than a time of adversity, if it were rightly improved. Nothing more distinctly marks the spirit of adoption than to cleave closely to the Lord in the height of health : it is the sign of a carnal mind to occupy itself with the earth till a time of sickness, and then begin to cry, Lord, Lord, open to us.

Nothing is said here about the profession of those primitive Christians : the only thing mentioned is their walk ; and it is described by two features. They walked " in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Both sides are given. All solid things have two sides. The engine and train cannot run on one rail ; a man cannot walk on one foot ; two are required to balance each other. The new life must also be sustained on two that are in some sense opposite to each other. Such was the Christian experience that issued from the empty grave of Jesus ; " they departed from the sepulchre with fear and great joy." Such precisely was the life of the disciples in Judæa when they obtained a breathing time after persecution. " This Child is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel." They were bowed down, and then raised up. Their hearts were first broken, and then healed. They feared greatly before the Lord because of sin, and then the Holy Ghost comforted them by showing them the things of Christ.

What is a Disciple ?

BY REV. J. MONRO GIBSON, D.D.

"When Saul was come to Jerusalem he assayed to join himself to the disciples,"
&c.—Acts ix. 26.

A Christian is a disciple of Christ. Disciple, as we all know, means a scholar, a learner. A learner of what? I think a good many people would say "religion." It would be a bad answer. Though the word religion has come to be so common in Christian parlance, it is a very uncommon word in Scripture. Christ Himself never used it, not even once. The word religion indeed is somewhat like the word Christian; it comes from heathenism; it is a heathen word; it did not belong to the Christians of the early times. It is vague and indefinite, and what is still worse, it seems to many to convey the idea of something quite distinct from ordinary life. Religion, oh yes, for the Sunday and for the Church! But "business is business," and pleasure is pleasure. Suppose, then, we discard the objectionable word, and look for another. And as we are taking the name Christ Himself used, suppose we take His word for this also. What is it He professes? What is it He undertakes to teach, to give to those who come to His school—what is it? If He never offers anybody religion, what does He offer? *Life*, always *life*. He undertakes to teach us the meaning and the use of life; to show us the way of life, to provide us with the means of life, to lay down the laws of life, to give us the joy of life, and finally to lead us on to the consummation of life in the great hereafter; so you see it is a far better word. If it is life, why then it is just as good for the Monday and the Saturday as the Sunday. Life is the great subject, both the life here and the life hereafter. From this you see the breadth of the relationship. Christians are not mere disciples, who have chosen Christ as their teacher in some particular branch, as philosophy, or morals, or even religion. Not at all. They are persons learning of Christ how to live. There is evidently something more than teaching here, there is training as well. The school of Christ is a practical school: those who enter into it are not only taught the way of life, but induced to walk in it; not only informed as to the means of life, but trained in the use of them; not only made acquainted with the laws of life, but schooled in obedience to them; not only pointed to the joy of life, but educated up to the actual enjoyment of it. Christians are persons who have entrusted themselves to Christ to be taught and to be trained in pure, noble living for time and for eternity. So much for the extent of the relationship.

Now for its content. What is contained in it? What constitutes true discipleship? What are the marks of the true disciple? Three, and I can think of only three. The first is *humility*. The position of a learner is of necessity a humble position. A proud man scorns to take it; a self-sufficient man does not need to learn from another. If a man thinks himself well versed in mathematics he will not seek the help of a mathematical teacher; and if a man thinks he knows how to live he will not enter the school of another to be taught and trained how to live aright. A certain amount of the grace of humility, therefore, is absolutely essential. If anyone ask, How much? all we can say is, there must be so much as to lead the man to feel his need to be shown the way of life, taught and trained how to live here and hereafter.

The second essential thing is *faith*—faith in the Master. Now let no one imagine

there is anything strange or unusual here, or peculiar to Christianity ; it is absolutely necessary to all kinds of discipleship. It does not matter how simple a case you take. You must have confidence in the ability of the Master to do for you what He undertakes to do. Confidence in the ability of the Master, what is that ? It is just faith ; and precisely the kind of faith essential to Christian discipleship. A man might confess there is much about life here and hereafter which he did not know and could not reach, but then he might not think Christ was competent to teach and help him. Confessing his own inability, he might still doubt or deny the Master's ability. It is clear then that in this case, as in every other, there must be faith, that is confidence in the Master in order to discipleship. And if we were asked how much, we should say, Just so much as to induce you to bow to His authority, to entrust yourself to Him, and to submit to His discipline. You remember the man who said, " Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief." It is clear that man's faith was not very strong, but it was strong enough to prove him a disciple. For though he admits his unbelief, he yet asks Christ to help it.

Take another case. We read on one occasion, after some of the Master's hard sayings, that many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. They lost confidence in Him. Then said Jesus to the twelve, Will ye also go away ? Notice the answer. It is not intimated that they did not feel the difficulties the others had felt. On the contrary, they had their doubts and difficulties like the rest, but then they do not desert the Master on account of these doubts and difficulties. That is the difference. They do not see anyone that can take the Master's place, and accordingly they make up their minds, in spite of doubts and difficulties, to hold on to Him. So in answer to the question, Will ye also go away ? they say, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life." From these cases it is evident that the amount of faith essential to discipleship is not very great ; but there must, of course, be enough of it to induce a man, in spite of the doubts he may sometimes feel, and the difficulties he may often meet, to take Christ's way of it, and learn of Him.

This leads us to the third requisite, namely, *obedience*, or willingness to obey. Here again there is nothing more than is absolutely necessary in all kinds of discipleship. When a pupil puts himself under the instruction of a master, it will not be enough that he have, on the one hand, a humble estimate of his attainments, and on the other confidence in his instructor's ability, unless he is prepared to follow the directions of the master in whatever pertains to the subject, not only studying what he prescribes, but doing the exercises, the practical work, which he assigns. This is just a roundabout way of saying that in addition to humility and faith there must be obedience, *i.e.*, willingness to obey.

As for the extent of the obedience, it of course corresponds to the extent of the discipleship. If it be drawing the pupil is learning, he must follow the master's instructions in what pertains to that subject. The authority of the master extends no further. In such a case the authority on the one hand, and obedience on the other, are quite limited in range. But in the case of the Christian disciple, inasmuch as the subject is life, the range of authority on the one hand, and of obedience on the other, is very wide. There must be a submission to the Master in all that pertains to life. So you see it includes the regulation of thought and feeling. Oh, how much we owe to Christ for that—those of us that are in His school. It is so hard, so difficult, and He gives such help there. His authority then extends to the most secret thoughts of the heart, everything that belongs to life.

A moment's reflection will show that this last is not so much a separate thing, as the result of the two former, supplying in this way a test of their genuineness.

If a person professes to be anxious to learn a particular subject, and yet refuses to follow his master's instructions, it proves either that he is not anxious to learn, or that he does not believe in the master. This is where some professing Christians stand; they claim to be disciples, and as such anxious to learn. They claim to be disciples of Christ, and as such fully confident in His ability to instruct and train them. But they do not try to obey Him, which proves either that they do not care to learn, or that they do not really have the confidence in Christ they profess to have. On the other hand, wherever there is obedience to Christ, the giving of one's self up to Him to be taught and trained for eternal life, there is sufficient evidence of genuine discipleship, for no such self-surrender would be possible without that humility and faith on which discipleship is founded.

From this point of view we can clearly understand why it is our Lord, in exhorting His followers to bear much fruit, says, "So shall ye be My disciples." He lays the stress on the fruit-bearing, not because He undervalues faith, but because in the fruit He sees the proof of its genuineness. Though a tree is known by its fruit, it is wholly dependent on what is out of sight, in the ground. So when obedience lifts up its foliage and fruitage to Heaven, then, and then only, are you sure there are strong roots of faith struck down deep into the soil of humility, while Heaven's blessing descends in the sunshine and the rain.

Notice how simple all this is; how free from all mystery and mystification. Three things alone are necessary. First: A humble opinion of yourself; a humble enough opinion of yourself, to make you think it worth your while to learn of Christ.

Second: A high enough opinion of Christ to lead you to put confidence in Him.

Third: A putting of yourself into His hand, willing to take what He has to give you, and to do what He will tell you.

Is it possible that any of you can stumble at this and say it is too hard, too much? Let me stop and put it to you again now. Have you, in the first place, a humble enough opinion of yourself to make you think it worth your while to learn of Christ? or do you really think you know better about it than He does? Have you, or have you not, a humble enough opinion of yourself to make you think it worth your while to learn of Christ, and get something from Him? Second: Have you a high enough opinion of Christ to lead you to put confidence in Him? And, third: Are you not willing to put yourself into His hand, willing to have what He will give you, and try to do what He will tell you?

If you can answer yes to these three questions you are a disciple, and ought to join yourself to other disciples without delay. Is not that plain? How many are there who are continually perplexing themselves about the mystery and difficulty of coming to Christ, and believing in Christ; whereas if they would only look at it in the way Christ Himself puts it, it is the simplest thing in the world.

Let us look at the three things again, and see whether they be so hard, whether there be any stumbling-block, any terrible obstacle in the way. First: Humility, a low opinion of yourself. That is the real difficulty with many, it is to be confessed; it is perhaps the greatest hindrance of all. I believe that if we could get at those in every Christian congregation who have refused to become disciples of Christ, and find the secret of it, in nine cases out of ten it would be conceit of themselves. So many are proud and self-sufficient, and think they can do perfectly well with their own talents and resources; but it is not these we have specially in view to-night. These, of course, are not disciples, and will never be till they humble themselves, or are humbled. But I am thinking of those who are disciples, and yet are too timid to acknowledge it. To such there will be no difficulty as to humility, the low opinion of themselves, which is the first step.

Now the next point—Faith. There would be just as little difficulty here if it were realised that it is simply a high opinion of Christ. But so many think of faith as some mysterious thing. They have a notion that before it can be said they believe they must make up their minds on a host of difficult questions on what is called theology. Their idea of faith is belief of a creed. The Bible idea is always faith in a person—confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. As to the difficult questions which often perplex us, is it not enough to remember we are only at school? If we cannot answer now, we may be able to answer after our course is completed. You do not expect the scholar to answer everything before he enters, do you? Meantime it is enough to be able to give a satisfactory answer to the simple question, What think ye of Christ? Have you confidence in Him, confidence enough in Him to take what He gives you, especially two things—the forgiveness of your sins, and the gift of eternal life?—and having taken what He gives you (that is the first thing), then to try to do what He tells you.

This leads again to the third point—obedience. Perhaps you feel the difficulty is here. You say, I have not been obedient; I have not fully kept the commandments of Christ. That is not the point. It is not what you have done, but what you are willing to do. Don't forget it is a school you are asked to join. We are to learn obedience. Willingness to obey is all that is wanted at first. The Church is a school of holiness; but does it follow that all who are in it are holy persons? It is the reverse. It is those who stay outside the Church who make a profession of goodness, not those who are within. If we were already holy persons, the school would be no place for us. A school is for those who need to learn, not for those who have learned. The commonest answer you get from those who decline to join the school of Christ is, "I am not good enough." Not good enough to join a school of goodness! Is that sense or nonsense? It reminds one of the boy who made up his mind never to go into the water till he had learnt to swim. It is because you are not good enough that you are asked to join the school of Christ—for no other reason. It is because I was not good enough that I joined it many years ago, and it is because I am not nearly good enough that I stay in it in the hope of learning something, in the hope of getting from my Master Christ that goodness that I do not have myself. Will you not come for the same reason? My friends, you would shame us if you were good enough.

Once more I put the three questions. Have you not a humble enough opinion of yourself to make it worth your while to come and learn of Christ? Have you not a high enough opinion of Christ to lead you to put confidence in Him? and are you not willing to put yourself into His hands to take what He has to give you, and to learn to do what He tells you? That is all that is asked. Is it too much? It is all that Christ asks to begin with; it is all that the Church asks to begin with. The Church is not, and was never intended to be, a society of learned or good people, but only of those who wish to learn how to become pure and good, and to obtain from Christ the purity and goodness and nobility of character and life which they feel they have not in themselves. It is, in other words, a company of disciples; and all that is asked of those who join us is evidence of true discipleship, willingness to learn what Christ has to teach us. You need not wonder then that it should be a peculiarly sad thing for us who know what a great and good Master He is, how valuable the lessons are He has to teach us, how measureless the wealth He has to bestow; you can imagine it is a peculiarly sad thing that there should be so many who will refuse all His invitations, and decline to be numbered among His disciples.

One word of suggestion to those who have taken the name and place of disciples. See that ye be disciples indeed. Are you? *Are you?* What are you learn-

ing? In one way it is an easy thing to be a disciple; it is as simple and natural as going to school. In another way it is hard. There are difficulties in the teaching, and very often in the training. And if on account of these difficulties you cease to learn, you are disciples no longer. Let us all look well to this, and remember those words of the Master, of warning on the one hand, and of encouragement on the other: "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The Compassion of St. Barnabas

BY REV. W. C. E. NEWBOLT, M.A.

"Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles," &c. — Acts ix. 27.

I. It must have been a moment of deep feeling and painful suggestiveness to St. Paul when he found himself back again in the streets of Jerusalem. That place from which he had rushed to seek fresh victims in the intensity of religious passion, but a short time back, where the ground seemed yet moistened with the blood of that holy man whose memory and whose constancy haunted him—"Thy martyr Stephen." Jerusalem, where the scenes of that great mystery against which he had raged and frantically scoffed, now invited him as a pilgrim, where before they had expelled him as a Puritan. It is a strange experience, which in some degree many of us have felt where a slight change in our condition of joy or sorrow, prosperity or adversity, seems to set as it were to another tune the surroundings of life, the buildings and streets of the city, the lanes and fields of the country. We pipe unto them, and they dance in answer to our joy; we mourn unto them, and they lament in responsive sympathy. But seldom, if ever, has there been such a change as that which wrenched round the heart of the Apostle, so sudden and so sharp. We see from the terms in which he speaks of himself, and from the description given of his wonderful conversion, what pain, what a sense of loss, what agony, were mingled with that mighty change. It was a whole process concentrated into a moment, so that he could only speak of himself as an untimely birth, and we know, or we can imagine how sensitive the heart must be at such a moment, how very deep the impression, how very earnest the impulses, and how very delicate all the feelings. "The ardour of a convert" has become proverbial. But he had not calculated on the slow, cautious estimate of men and things which the instinct of self-preservation produces in the world. He finds himself in an atmosphere where development was taking its normal course, and men were learning the graduated lesson of their environment, slowly, steadily, surely, going up the steps that led to God, and no wonder that they were astonished to see one taking his place beside them, as it were with a bound, burning what he had adored, and adoring what he had burned with startling rapidity. What did they know of the unseen working of God in that man's heart? Who—as in the miracle of turning the water into wine at Cana, He concentrated into a moment the process which day by day in nature is spread over a long and graduated course—so here, in the person of St. Paul, had turned a persecutor into an Apostle by one act of omnipotent grace. They were afraid of him, they did not trust him, they shunned him, they remembered his history—he was a man with a past. We cannot wonder.

But O! for the chill which must have struck the warm heart of him who was throbbing and yearning with his new-found love, and the devotion of a heart which, however mistaken, had all through life eagerly followed after that which

was right and true. Men have cried out before now against the cruelty of Nature, which under its smiling beauty presents only cold and dry breasts to its starving infants, a salt sea to raging thirst, a cold mantle of rock and snow to those who seek shelter. Equally have they found how cold and cruel is the world to those who wander homeless up and down its empty streets because they have fallen, out of its sympathy, out of its many grooves, and run counter to its prejudices. It is part of the *pœna damni*, the punishment of loss which wrong-doing brings with it even here, that it cuts off the evil-doer from the sympathy and friendliness of the world around him.

This, also, for that miserable man
Is a worse trouble than his heart can know—
That in the strait and sodden ways of sin
He has made him alien to the plenteous day,
Cut off from friendliness with woods that rouse,
And happy pasture and carousing sea.
And whatsoever loving things enjoy,
Simply the kind simplicity of God !

It is here that we see the loving intervention of St. Barnabas, that bright and godlike Apostle, whom the Church is celebrating to-day, with his grave and commanding mien, so that the men of Lystra called him Jupiter. Free and impulsive, if possible, to a fault, hastening to throw himself with an utter *abandon* into the early attempts at communion in the Church, parting with his land in Cyprus, generous in his actions and thoughts and intentions about people. As afterwards with St. Mark, he was sure there was some good in him, and would not give him up ; as in the perplexing and new departure in relation to the Gentiles at Antioch, he was ready to recognise at once the grace of God and rejoice in it ; as in his tenderness and sympathetic desire to go as far as he could with people, he went too far in the Judaic question which agitated the Early Church—so here is his opportunity. Here is this great and valuable instrument for God in trouble, under suspicion, in danger it might be of being chilled off ; he takes him and brings him to the Apostles, St. Peter and St. James. He explains to them exactly what had happened, and what a marvellous example of the grace of God was before them, and did what was really that great work, not only for the development of an important and mighty career, but for the Church at large which benefited by it, when he dispersed by his bright sunlight unmanly suspicion, and showed that God works in many ways and in many characters, and that although the waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly, that yet the Lord Who dwelleth on high is mightier.

II. We are dealing to-day, brethren, with a moral catastrophe, at all events to us more complete and more revolting than that which had shattered the powerful personality known as Saul. There was a time in his call, we know, when his education, his citizenship, his religious training only seemed to supply a fresh momentum to his downward course ; but we are dealing with moral wrecks, not intellectual or spiritual, with those who have taken the meaning out of some of the greatest terms of life—womanhood, motherhood, home, happiness—and have sunk into that awful abyss of a life dominated by passion and governed by the bodily lusts. We want a St. Barnabas, some of that spirit which will go to meet the poor crushed life now feeling its way back again into the right path, where memories start up on every side to daunt, and the past is a menace, and the present a protest, and the future despair. We want the spirit of St. Barnabas,

which will go to the good people and say, You at least, must help. You care for something more than propriety, you think of something beyond outraged decency ; here is a soul for whom Christ died chilled and repressed and driven back on evil, because you are afraid and doubtful and point at the past, and are incredulous as to the sincerity of the repentance or the motive of the change. You who call yourselves Christian, followers of the Crucified, remember how He said that His mission was not only to seek, but to *save* that which was lost. Here is the poor soul struggling out of the engulfing waves which threaten to overwhelm it, and in every direction as it thinks to draw itself up on the solid bank it crumbles beneath its grasp. Professions and posts of usefulness are closed, sympathy withheld, comfort and pity withdrawn ; and those who eagerly read the poisoned story or gaze at the seducing play are the first to shrink from the victims of low social morality.

We want the spirit of St. Barnabas, with his kind, gentle, strong touch, to rescue for Christ souls among some of whom we may even find the making of a saint and the stuff which may become an Apostle. Oh, that this cold, calculating society, in its icy propriety and dead selfishness, could hear those words so tender and so stern : " Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. A certain man had two debtors ; one of them owed five hundred pence and the other fifty, and when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me, which of them will love him most ? " Simon answered and said, " I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." And He said unto him, " Thou hast rightly judged." It may be that penitence out of its dead experience, where it has faced death over the very yawning gulf of hell, may yet there have paused to gather a flower of sanctity and absorbing love, which only grows in those spots of desperate danger. And the forgiven most loves most, because it has nearly lost all.

We talk, and we talk truly of a fall, and those who have to deal with such cases will tell us what a fall it is : that honour, integrity, honesty, self-respect all go ; it is a crash of the whole moral being. Purity is as it were that little bit of glass in the scientific toy known as the Rupert drop—if you pull it off, the whole glass falls to pieces. And, therefore, any effort which is to be of use, and availing for restoration, must be thorough ; the will must be set once more firmly on its throne, from which passion has ousted it. The rebellious impulses, desires and fancies must be brought under rule. The spirit, shattered and broken, must be put in connection with God, so that once more grace and sacraments may do their healthy and bracing work. A sense of sin must be set up in the soul, not as a forbidden luxury, which the insincerity of social life permits without blame to some, but visits with moral disfranchisement in the case of others, but as something itself hateful, an injury, a blow, a flaw in the integrity of human nature, a cruel insult to God. The beauty of holiness and the power of grace must be developed and once more the love of God be shed abroad in the heart, until the penitents can see that gentle form which once carried them as lambs in His arms in the days of innocence, come back to them as the Good Shepherd of the lost sheep, to carry them on His shoulders rejoicing, in the tender grace of penitence.

III. You know the need ; you know that there are souls for whom Christ died, who are stricken to death by a wound cruel and desperate, while society plays and dances at their side, affecting with hollow hypocrisy to be shocked, while it sends year by year its fresh quota of victims to the monster of iniquity who swallows up the flower of our youth and defaces the chivalry of our national life.

Among the illustrious heroes and mighty men and women whose ashes rest in Westminster Abbey, there lies one on whose grave is written the simple record of a

noble achievement, a life spent in the endeavour to mitigate slavery, which is there described as "the open sore of the world."

My brethren, in this city (and alas ! in every town of Europe), while it still calls itself Christian, there is a sore, worse, more terrible still—the slavery of souls bound fast in deadly and loathsome shame. There are young lives crushed and broken who but lately were innocent children at their mother's knee. There are grey heads bowed down and shrinking away to die, stricken through and through with a daughter's shame. Nothing, it has been said, but the Infinite pity, is sufficient for the infinite pathos of human life, and there is no subject more heart-rending than this. A modern writer has described to us the monks in the solitary recesses of the Grand Chartreuse, in their night services praying for the world. "I heard their entreaty for men who at that moment of the dark night were forgetting God, and truth, purity, and goodness. I heard the murmur of the solemn petition which had gone up to the Throne of Grace night after night for many centuries. Prayers for the poor and the wretched, for the guilty and the sin-laden, for the dying and the dead, for the faint-hearted that they might hope again in God, for the light-hearted lest they might forget God." Pray on, men of God ! Pray for London ; pray for her army of outcasts ; pray for the lurid glare or vice which mounts up to Heaven each night. Pray for the selfishness of human sin which feeds on souls for whom Christ died. Pray for the sounds of ribald revelry, which insult the quiet peace of the midnight heaven. Pray for the cold cynic who turns his back on sin, and dispassionately examines statistics, and questions the propriety of a too enthusiastic interference. What are we doing for the outcast ? Are we in any sense a St. Barnabas to them ?

There is one thing which we may never do, and that is despair. We will not despair of society ; we will not despair of the individual ; we will not despair of ourselves. Here is a society which confidently asserts, without fear of contradiction, that it is doing God's work in God's way. Unless you think you can do it better, come and work with them, come to their help. For the question is one of widespread and appalling significance. Who knows how many Saint Pauls are being lost for want of a St. Barnabas ?

Rest from Persecution

BY REV. JOHN SYM.

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa," &c.—Acts ix. 31.

The hostility which had been manifested towards Christ during His life survived His decease, and was directed against His followers with pitiless and unmitigated violence, after He had ascended into Heaven. This issue had been frequently and clearly foretold by the Lord ; and the history of the Church contained in this book shows that His predictions were abundantly fulfilled. The disciples, however, undismayed by the threatenings of their adversaries, went forth declaring the word with all boldness ; and with great power gave they witness to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Their freedom and fearlessness in preaching the word, the miracles which they wrought, and the remarkable success which attended their labours, inflamed and exasperated the resentment of their persecutors ; so that they not only commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, but they laid hands on them, imprisoned them, and scourged them ; and at length they imbrued their hands in the blood of Stephen. The slaughter

of this blessed martyr, however, did not appease their rage. On the contrary, it seems to have been the signal for an indiscriminate and fiery persecution. "At that time," we are told by the sacred historian, "there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the Apostles." At this period, Saul signalised himself as the enemy of the Christians. No age, no sex, no rank, nor character, could shield them from his fury. He made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison. He himself tells us that he persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering unto prison both men and women. Nor was his persecution confined to Jerusalem and its neighbourhood; for being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even to strange cities. And you will remember that it was when on his way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, that that event occurred which changed the current of his life.

It was a great persecution, then, which raged at this time—widely extended and very violent. How long it lasted we cannot precisely say; but it is probable that it abated on the conversion of Paul. It was not, however, wholly extinguished. This is apparent from what happened on Paul's coming to Jerusalem. "He spake boldly," we are told, "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Casarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." By this prudent course they allayed the reviving enmity of the Jews; and "then had the Churches rest throughout Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

There can be no doubt that a time of persecution or trial is frequently a season of spiritual quickening, and revival, and enlargement. Men naturally cling to the precious truths for which they suffer. At such a time, the worthlessness of the world and the preciousness of Christ are vividly realised; and zeal for His honour, an assurance of His favour, and the hope of His reward, can animate men to dare and to endure great things for His sake. There is reason, too, to think that the Lord draws very near to those who suffer in His cause, filling their hearts with peace, and causing them to overflow with joy: so that they never enjoy greater inward tranquillity, and are never more alert, and intrepid, and unembarrassed, than in the presence of danger and in the prospect of death. The cradle of the infant Church was rocked by tempests; and she was nursed into strength by painful watchings, and heavy labours, and severe sufferings. The faith, and patience, and self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness—the various graces which appear so lovely and so lustrous in the first Christians—these were the blessed fruits of the sorrows which they endured, and the struggles which they maintained. How calm, for example, the fortitude of the martyr Stephen! How exquisitely beautiful his meekness, and how sublime his magnanimity! And this character was to some extent made, as well as manifested, by the persecution which he underwent.

But though the power and grace of the Gospel have been illustriously displayed in seasons of trial, and though suffering has done much to exalt the character of the people of God, still it is more than doubtful whether long-continued affliction is most favourable for the full development of the Christian character. Persecution continued for a time worketh patience; but bent too far, the bow will break: and were it not for the overruling providence of God, their enemies would wear out the patience of the saints of the Most High. To this our Saviour alludes,

when He says, "There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be : and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved ; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Not only, however, may trials be too severe, or protracted too long, but a season of trial, though favourable to the development of some features of the Christian character, may not have an equally happy effect on the development of others. It may be doubted, for instance, whether such a season is favourable to the increase of our knowledge, or to a calm and comprehensive contemplation of the whole revealed will of God. Whatever is then received is looked at intently, and embraced tenaciously ; it enters into the heart ; it germinates and brings forth fruit ; it is spirit and life. But it is the truth which for the time is called in question, or the truth on which we rely for support and consolation, which chiefly occupies our attention. Everything else possesses for the time an inferior interest, and assumes a subordinate place ; and under the pressure of present urgent necessities, the consideration of many important topics is necessarily reserved or postponed. There is even a danger lest we may be too exclusively engrossed by some truths, and may assign to them an importance and value to which they are not in reality entitled. It is not in the hour of painful suffering or perplexing fear that the soul is in the fittest frame for taking a comprehensive and impartial view of divine revelation. That is not so much the time for gathering new stores of knowledge, as for feeding upon and realising the benefit of a few glorious truths and precious promises already possessed. It is the time for exercising faith rather than the time for gaining knowledge ; the time for making use of what we know, rather than for making new acquisitions.

It is not only, however, for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, but also for the purpose of cultivating many of the graces of the Christian life, that a season of rest seems to be desirable, if not indispensable. There are a thousand works and walks of active usefulness, which cannot be undertaken under affliction or persecution. There are a thousand ways of cultivating the affections, and glorifying God, and doing good to men, which apparently demand outward rest or peace. Persecution disorganises a community, and deranges all the relations between man and man, and in such an unnatural state of society it is impossible that the virtues of the Gospel can be fully developed or displayed. Those who are subject to trials are cut off from many opportunities both of usefulness and improvement. There are privileges which can be enjoyed, and services which can be rendered, and schemes of benevolence which can be prosecuted, only when the Churches have rest : and for the manifestation of a Christian character in the conduct of common life—for the exercise and exhibition of a Christian spirit and temper in the ordinary relations which subsist amongst us—for these it is requisite there should be peace.

Persecution or affliction, when sanctified by God, does certainly bring forth noble fruits. Faith, and fortitude, and patience, and kindred graces, are called forth in an eminent degree ; and under this stern teacher a character is formed, which is at once meek and magnanimous, modest yet majestic, humble yet aspiring ; and a character thus formed naturally attracts our sympathy, and awakens our admiration. But society, dislocated and torn asunder by violence and oppression, is not society in its natural or moral state ; and Christianity, while she fortifies and strengthens her votaries under the pressure of affliction and the persecutions of bloody men, also sheds her gracious and heavenly spirit over happier and more pacific times, adorning, and elevating, and blessing mankind as far as her influence is permitted to extend.

All honour to the memory of the martyrs for the faith and patience which

they displayed ; but let it not be forgotten that their homely virtues, though less dazzling, less heroic, less romantic, are perhaps not less precious in the eyes of those who know God, and man, and life aright. I call you to remember that these Churches which had faithfully endured a great light of afflictions were edified ; and that their edification was shown in their walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. A life spent in the fear and service of God, whatever the circumstances of the individual may be, is, to those who have spiritual discernment, one of the noblest spectacles which this earth presents. God forbid that we should even seem to disparage a great action or a heroic sacrifice at some critical conjuncture. But without detracting from the merit of the few, and regarding Christianity as the religion of God for mankind at large, can it be denied that there is something great also in the well-spent lives of the many ? It is a vulgar error to think there is nothing great but what is rare or romantic. God is great in the thunder, and the whirlwind, and the earthquake ; but is He less great in the mute and majestic movements of creation, in the march of the seasons, in the silent courses of the planets, in the gradual and invisible processes by which He elaborates a precious vegetation from the dull bosom of the earth, till at length the year is crowned with His goodness ? Jesus was great in His miracles—when He healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease—when He put a bridle on the viewless winds—when at His word the angry sea lay motionless and still as an infant in its placid slumbers—and when He called back the departed spirit and restored the dead to life ; but was He in reality less great when He went about doing good—instructing the ignorant and comforting the mourners ? We recognise a divinity in the Church when she appears as a bush that burneth and is not consumed ; but is she less divine, or her vocation less lofty, when she is scattering the blessings of peace, and holiness, and love, and everlasting life, upon a guilty and perishing world ? The fruits of righteousness which might abound to the praise and glory of God in times when the Churches have rest—the multitude of pious and beneficent labours that might be carried on—the examples that might be afforded of religion impregnating all household duties, sanctifying all social relations, leavening all intercourse between man and man, pervading the whole business of ordinary life—these things may be less striking, less exciting ; but, after all, are they less honourable, less useful, less edifying, than the more dazzling achievements of strange and troublous times ? Do not these constitute manifestations of Christian character—of the life of God, in the soul—of the practical value and efficacy of the Gospel, which are not less interesting and important than those rarer exhibitions of fortitude and self-denial which can be witnessed only in a great fight of afflictions ?

The arrangements of providence are not under our control, but surely it were well for us to acquire the holy skill of taking such account of circumstances as to extract good from all the various providences of God. Is it not interesting and instructive to contemplate these early Christians, released from the pressure of outward trials, turning themselves to the work of their own improvement, and employing the leisure and opportunities which their rest afforded, with a view to their own edification and the discharge of those duties which they owed to themselves and to those around them ? Doubtless their experience had taught them, that both as individuals and Churches they were in various respects weak and deficient ; and the journey of Peter, of which we read in the next verse, was probably undertaken with a view to the establishment of order and good government among them, and to perfect that which was lacking in their faith. No wonder if, like ships disabled in a storm, individuals had sustained a serious shock, and Churches had been thrown into some measure of derangement. They

set themselves accordingly to repair what was injured, and to prepare for their future course. They had been steadfast in the faith in a time of great trial, but a new sphere of duty was opened to them—they had to illustrate in their ordinary life the power, and grace, and value of that Gospel, for which they were prepared to encounter death—they had, by their good conversation in Christ, to win over others to the obedience of the faith. They applied themselves, therefore, to the work of edifying themselves; and, with the blessing of God upon them, they were built up in holiness and love, and the result was, that “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they were multiplied.”

This result is the second topic to which we intended to direct your attention; but our remarks upon it must be very brief. These Churches, having rest, were edified; and the way in which their edification manifested itself was their “walking”—performing their Christian and ordinary duties—“in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Having now escaped from the fear of man, they “walked in the fear of the Lord”—that is, they lived in all holiness, and righteousness, and truth, in an unreserved submission to the divine authority, and in a faithful compliance with the whole of God’s revealed will—“and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost”; for spiritual gladness is intimately connected with the maintenance of a good conscience, and a sincere delight in the law of the Lord. His countenance beholdeth the upright; and faithfulness toward God is usually connected with refreshing from His presence. And thus these disciples presented a new character and life to the view of the world—a life which, to the eye of corrupt nature, may in some aspects appear undesirable; for it is a life, not of ease and free indulgence, but of watchfulness, and self-denial, and active labour—a life, nevertheless, which commends itself to the consciences, and commands the respect of all men—a life, moreover, which yields a manifest satisfaction and joy to those who lead it, which affords to self-denial a pleasure which self-indulgence never gave, and which finds in a kindly charity and in all active usefulness a delight which selfishness never knew. Such was the life which these early Christians led—a life of singular holiness, and springing out of that holiness, a life of undissembled and unmistakeable cheerfulness. In the days of outward peace, they illustrated the virtues of that faith which persecution could not tempt them to abandon. And so, God, Who at the commencement of the persecution had disseminated the good seed of the word, by the dispersion of the disciples—for they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word—now when the persecution had ceased, consolidated and enlarged His Kingdom by the holy lives and the peaceful and cheerful labours of His devoted servants.

Is not the example of these early Christians fraught with instruction for us? May not this history teach us, that steadfastness in the day of trial is not all that is required of the Christian disciple, but faithfulness also and fruitfulness when the trial has passed away? May it not teach us, that it is not enough to fight the battles of the Faith, but that, after the din of controversy has ceased, we should seek to win the unbelieving and ungodly, by exhibiting the power and blessedness of the truth in our hearts and lives? It is not given to all to occupy the high places of the field, in maintaining and defending the truth as it is in Jesus; but there are none who may not manifest its power and value by a life of practical godliness. There is not one of you, however humble, who may not by a holy and consistent life, by a faithful and cheerful discharge of the duties of his station, commend the truth which you profess to the consciences of others. Mark, I pray you, that in the instance before us, it was not the preaching of Apostles, but the practice of common believers which was mainly instrumental in multiplying

converts to the Christian Faith. It was so in this instance, and it must have been so to some extent wherever the Apostles went. Under their preaching some believed ; but it was the marvellous and most blessed effects produced upon those who believed, that roused the curiosity and the wonder of others. " They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Believers became living Epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. They afforded a practical proof of the comforting and transforming power of the doctrine which the Apostles taught. From them sounded out the word of the Lord ; and while their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world, some seeing their good works, glorified their Father in Heaven.

The preaching of the Gospel can never be dispensed with ; but it is comparatively a feeble instrument, unless it is confirmed and illustrated by the piety and the practical righteousness of living Christians. And never was there a time when this practical testimony to the truth and power of the Gospel was more needed than in the present day. There is a general heaving in society—throughout all classes and all ranks an aspiration after something that has not been attained, a yearning after something that has not been attained, a yearning after something that has never been enjoyed. There is a growing tendency to remove ancient land-marks—a growing disposition to alter creeds and to forsake long established usages and forms ; sometimes there is an attempt to impregnate with new life superannuated and decayed superstitions. You see the desire of which I speak in the various forms of Socialism. You see it in various forms of Infidelity. You see it in the various efforts which are made for the amelioration and improvement of society. Everything betokens the necessity of a new life. May it not be said that " the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God " ? We need no new doctrine, no untried institutions. The ancient, sublime, and venerable verities of the Christian Faith, lodged in the hearts and operating on the lives of its professors, this is all that is necessary to effect the peaceful renovation of society. It is not the nostrums which in this uneasy age emanate, from time to time, from fearful because thoughtful men—it is not the legislation of sagacious and liberal statesmen—it is not the religion of controversy, nor the religion of a feeble and ephemeral literature, nor the religion of public excitement, nor the sentimental religion which mopes in solitude over frames and feelings, that we specially need. These, or most of these things are good and useful, and not by any means to be undervalued. But what is mainly required—that without which all other things will prove unavailing—is the fresh, healthy, vigorous, happy, practical religion of the time when men walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost—a religion which is fed and sustained by reading, and holy meditation, and fervent prayer, but which manifests itself in fruits of righteousness and labours of love—the pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father, which is, " to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." Is there anything more urgently demanded than this, if we would save society, or vindicate the honour of our most holy Faith ? We profess to believe in a Divine Redeemer, Whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and who has been made Head over all things for His body's sake, which is the Church ; we profess to believe in the grace and power of that Almighty Spirit, Who raised up Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead, to quicken those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and raise them up that they may sit together with Christ in heavenly places ; we profess to have been made partakers of the great salvation, to have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, to have imbibed the Spirit and to be walking in the footsteps of our holy and compas-

sionate Saviour; and yet, we have allowed to grow and accumulate—not in some hidden quarter, or in some distant and unknown region, but in the very midst of us—an amount of ignorance, and profligacy, and misery, which fills the patriot with alarm, and at the sight of which humanity sickens. Is it wonderful, if in these circumstances the world be led to suspect the divinity and efficacy of our holy religion? And where lies the blame? Is it not with the Church herself? Is it not in reality she, who by her own inefficiency and unfaithfulness has engendered this horrible suspicion, and brought this foul dishonour upon that worthy name whereby she is called? Is it not owing to her own supineness and impotency, that thoughtful and speculative men are now despairing of the Gospel remedy for such evils, and are looking for the regeneration of the world through scenes of confusion, and anarchy, and distress, such as no man can venture to foretell?

In these circumstances, how urgent the admonition, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works!" Oh that the Church and all her members were stirred up to wipe out the foul di-grace attaching to them, and provoke one another to love and good works! Some of you may have little in your power, whether in the way of means, or influence, or talent, or example; nevertheless the obscurest and humblest among you may do something; and if it be only a faithful discharge of the duties of your station, even that may be made instrumental in convincing others, that godliness with contentment is great gain. Walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and through Him Who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, we may confidently expect that now, as of old, believers will be multiplied, and Jesus see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Quiet Times

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

"Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judæa," &c.—Acts ix. 31.

The right use of quiet times is a great secret of Christian living. Human life is made up of alternations of storm and calm, of trouble and rest. It is so with individual life, and it is so with collective life; the life of a nation, or the life of a Church.

The earlier part of this chapter indicated a time of trouble for the Christian community. Persecution was hot against them: "even unto strange cities" they were followed by threats of violence. But now the chief persecutor has himself felt the force of truth; "a stronger than the strong man armed" has interposed, and he who was entering Damascus to make havoc of Christ's people is "now preaching the faith which once he destroyed."

Other causes may have contributed to the change indicated in the text. It is said that the Roman Emperor Caligula, who in the year 38 succeeded Tiberius, was making an impious attempt to place his own image in the temple at Jerusalem; and that the attention of the Jewish authorities was wholly occupied with plans for frustrating his design. They had no time to persecute. Thus even "the fierceness of man may turn to God's praise," and "the remainder of wrath" be "restrained" by His overruling hand.

"The Church then throughout the whole of Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified," gradually built up and strengthened; "and walking by the fear of the Lord," as their rule and direction, "and by the encouragement

of the Holy Spirit," by His comforting and quickening influence, both in the hearts of the disciples and in the ministry of the Apostles, "was multiplied." There were "added to the Church daily," not in Jerusalem only, but through the length and breadth of the land, "such as should be saved."

And the sacred history goes on to tell how particularly by the ministry of one man, St. Peter, this enlargement of the Church in Palestine was effected. He made it his business to go hither and thither, "strengthening all the disciples." Specimens of his ministry are given, in the two cases of Lydda and Joppa. In each of these a signal miracle attested the grace given to him. At Lydda there was a man, who had lain for eight years on a couch paralyzed, and who, at the authoritative word of Peter, "Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise, and make thy own bed," arose straightway, and contributed largely, by the notoriety of his miraculous cure, to the spread of the Gospel, both in his own town, and in the adjacent plain of Sharon.

At Joppa there was a Christian woman, of eminent piety; her life one continued succession of charitable and beneficent deeds. "She was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." With her own hands she ministered to the bodily wants of the poor. She busied herself in providing clothing for such as were in need. What a simple and instructive picture of the Christian women of all times! She lived in a place not larger probably at any time than many an English town: and there was nothing magnificent, in any sense, in her deeds of charity: but with God great and small are names unknown, and it has pleased Him to leave on record for all ages the history of this humble yet bright example. Let no Christian woman think for one moment that her charities are unnoticed or unregarded in Heaven. If they spring out of genuine love, first to Christ and then to His people, they are all written there, though it is neither needful for others nor good for themselves, that they be paraded in the book of the Church below.

At last the day of death arrived. "She fell sick and died." The usual offices were paid to the lifeless corpse; and then it was laid out in an upper chamber. But it pleased our Lord Jesus Christ to show Himself in this instance by the agency of another, as before on earth by His own, "the Lord of life and death." The disciples at Joppa heard that a holy Apostle was within ten miles of them at Lydda; and whether from a desire for his comfort at a time of sorrow, or from a vague undefined hope that he might even remove the cause of that sorrow, they sent him an urgent message, "not to delay to come to them." He obeyed the summons; not knowing (it may be) the precise work before him, but possessing that grace of which we have lately spoken, "the preparation (readiness) of the Gospel of peace," and desiring to lose no opportunity of applying his Master's hand, whether in its consolation or in its strength.

He arrived in Joppa. And there a sad scene presented itself. There was the poor lifeless body, made ready for its burial; and the room in which it lay was thronged with mourning friends, all recounting what they had lost, and showing the practical proofs of piety in garments made for the poor by those busy industrious hands which are now (as they deem) for ever still in death. The Spirit of the Lord came upon the Apostle, and suggested to him a miracle above miracles; the restoration of this loved disciple to a longer life in the body. "He put them all out," desiring, like his Master before him, an entire calm from distracting sights and sounds, that he might bring together every energy of his soul for that wrestling with God in prayer, which could alone give strength for a work so stupendous. Then "he knelt down and prayed." At last "he turned to the body," and calling the departed person by name bade her (in one brief decisive word) "arise.

She opened her eyes "once more upon the familiar scenes around, saw her restorer, and was by him "presented alive" to the little community which was bewailing her. Well can we understand that, when this "became known throughout Joppa, many believed on the Lord"; and thus a large work, both of preaching and guiding, was opened before the Apostle, which constrained him to "abide many days in Joppa" in that humble dwelling from which he was to be called forth in God's Providence to a yet more significant use of the keys of the Heavenly Kingdom.

I have sought, my brethren, to lay before you in one view the inspired instruction here given, as to the use of a season of tranquillity such as that which lasts, for us, by God's blessing, all our life long, and which may still continue—we know not—as it has still continued from generation to generation. As a Church, as professors of the Gospel of Christ, we are in peace: no man oppresses and "no man forbids" us. Let us see then what we ought to be: what is the proper character and the proper work of a Church or a Congregation thus living in "quietness from fear of evil."

"The Churches had peace": how did they use it? Did it make them indolent? unfruitful? unfaithful? inconsistent? quarrelsome?

Two things are said of them: first, they were "edified"; secondly, they were "multiplied."

1. "Edified." The figure is taken from the rise and progress of a building.

(1) The whole Church, of all lands and times, is a building; one building; planned by one Architect, carried on by one builder, designed for one end, to be the eternal habitation of God Himself when at last (as a Prophet has written) "the headstone is brought forth with shoutings." It is not easy to apprehend this unity. Only He Who "sees the end from the beginning" can see the universal Church as one. But the thought, however faintly conceived, is full of comfort. It puts each one of us in his place: it shows us how small is the place of each one; and yet also it shows us that each one has his place, and that, if the place of any one be not filled, there is a chink, a fissure, a blank, be it ever so small, in the finished work. Is not that honour enough, and importance enough, for a creature and a sinner? Does it not say, loudly enough, and also persuasively enough, to each one of us, See that thy place in the universal temple be not a blank, or worse?

2 Again, the Church of each land and of each age—let me say (for the time is short) the Church of each town in each generation—is a building. Yes, it may be but a fragment, but one corner, or one buttress, or one pinnacle, of the Universal Church; but you all know how any building, how this Church in which we are assembled, would look if one buttress fell or if one pinnacle were dislodged from it; and therefore you will not count it a small thing if some such humble position as that, or a position humbler still, be all that belongs to this our little community as it exists this year or this day in the sight of an all-seeing and all-regarding God. I say that this congregation of ours is a building: and is it then being "edified," that is, built up? is it making any progress? is it rising, in solidity, in unity, in beauty? is it giving signs, more and more, of its destination as a habitation of God, as a place in which Christ Himself is to dwell and to walk, to be adored and beloved, throughout eternity? God grant it! We want more amongst us still of this collective feeling, of this sense of union and of unity, as a Church: if we would be "edified," we must cherish it.

(3) And then, yet once more, each human soul, taken separately, is a building. "Your body," St. Paul says, addressing individual Christians, "is the temple of the Holy Ghost Which is in you, which ye have of God." Each one of us is a

building. How much we lose sight of this ! living from day to day without one thought of the progress and of the unity of that personal being, which must be fit, when we die—if we would not be for ever miserable—to be God's abode, God's dwelling place, God's temple, through an eternal age ! What a question is it, for each one, how is that building which is I myself getting on ? Are the foundations deeply and soundly laid, in the faith of Christ my Saviour ? Is the superstructure rising day by day, gradually, regularly, quietly, yet consciously, perceptibly, visibly ? In other words, Am I growing in grace ? more and more prevailing over evil tempers, and sinful passions, and carnal lusts ? better able to do as unto God the work which He has given me, and to overcome, in the strength of God, the temptations which assail me ? Times of tranquillity ought to be times of edifying : alas ! too often they are times of suspended energy and of deep defilement.

2. Another thing is said of the congregations here described. They were edified : they were also "multiplied."

A time of peace ought to be a time of outward as well as inward progress ; a time of extension as well as a time of edification. It was so of old. "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." How is it now ? How is it with the outskirts of the Church, with lands in which only Missions can operate ? Is there zeal at home, in founding and in reinforcing such institutions ? Is there a real interest in the reception of tidings from the Church's workmen abroad, as to the success of their labours ? Alas ! you know, my brethren, how impossible it is to gain even a hearing for such matters. You know that, with much philanthropy, there is little Gospel zeal amongst us ; that, where a thousand pounds can be gathered for a work of charity, it is hard to collect ten for a work of piety ; hard to gain any response for a call to aid the Church's Missions, or to extend into new regions the knowledge of a Lord and Saviour. The Church is scarcely in this sense "multiplying" : new lands are not being evangelized : the Gospel net is scarcely spreading itself at all over the distant, the untracked waters.

And at home, how is it ? Here, in this town, is the Church at all "multiplying" ? I trust so ; but these results are not wrought without means, without honest and hearty efforts on the part of those whose own hearts are first won for Christ. Can we point, by tens, or by fives, or by units, to new persons brought to be worshippers, and brought to be communicants, by agencies now working amongst us ? Let us pray for this, and let us labour too ; not for our own glory, but for God's ; not in our own strength, but in Christ's only ; that individual victories may be won for Him on His enemy's soil, and that this sign of vitality may be largely vouchsafed to us, that the Church which is Christ's body is not being edified only, but multiplied !

We are not left in the dark as to how this may be done ; what influences are mighty, through God, to this enlargement of His Son's fold. The Church multiplies, by its own progress in two things ; walking (1) in the fear of the Lord, and (2) in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.

(1) "The fear of the Lord" is the fear of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves not our love only, but our fear also. Does that seem strange to any one ? Is He not our "merciful and faithful High Priest, ever living to make intercession for us" ? Is He not described as "the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" ? Blessed be God, the words are His own ; written for our comfort, and for our attraction towards Him. But they are not written to encourage us in evil. They are not written to make us careless about sin. They would not be God's words for us, if that were

their effect. I suppose there is nothing which so solemnizes and so awes the mind of man as the thought of an absolutely disinterested and an absolutely unbounded love. It says of itself, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" The greatness of the salvation is the measure of the danger.

"To trample under foot the Son of God, to count the blood of the covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing," must indeed be of all crimes the blackest and the most fatal. And that is what men do every day for want of this very fear of which the text speaks; the fear of the Lord, of Jesus Christ. Let us learn to regard Him as not only dying for sin but abhorring sin; hating it with a perfect hatred, as warring against that will of the Father which is man's deliverance and sanctification. My brethren, it is a dangerous thing when there is a prevalent laxity, in a congregation, or in a house, or in a soul, as to this fear of Christ; when all is resolved into that sort of love (falsely so called) which is mere easiness and weakness; when the whole of religion is resolved into feeling, and that feeling not one of reverent awe, but of presumptuous trust. To walk in the fear of Christ is one half of Christianity.

(2) And then, so walking, there is room also for the other characteristic; "and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." These things are given in explanation of the Churches multiplying; given, that is, in illustration of the effect produced upon bystanders and lookers on. To see a Christian fear Christ, tends to multiply the Church. There is an awe about it, which is no repulsion. To see that a man lives every day in the remembrance of his Saviour; gives up what He forbids, loves what He commands, sets Him always before him, is jealous for His honour and personally seeks His glory; this, if in one sense alarming, is in another winning too; it is marvellously impressive, in a world like ours, so self-seeking and so godless, to see a man really living for another, to see a man really "looking not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal." But if, in addition to this walking in the fear of Christ, there be also a visible walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; if a man is not watchful only but happy, too; if it is evident that he "has meat to eat which man knows not of," and a spring of life within with which no stranger can intermeddle; it is scarcely possible that this should have no effect, under God, in multiplying His Churches: we may doubt whether any man ever so lived, without having been the means of adding to the Lord at least one soul that should be saved. "The comfort of the Holy Ghost" is not a mere soothing influence within; it is a cheering power without also. The same word is rendered by "comfort" and by "exhortation." The "son of consolation" is a "son" also "of exhortation." The comforts of God are all powers, too. God comforts by cheering on; by encouraging to action; by giving a new impulse to the life within, so that it shall spring forth to higher hopes, nobler efforts, and greater attainments. Therefore he who walks in the comfort of the Holy Ghost is evermore a partaker of that Spirit Which is one "of power" as well as "of love and of a sound mind." We may try the reality of our comfort, by this one test: does it stir me up and spur me on to action? does it make me vigorous as well as peaceful? does it say, in the depths of my soul, not "Rest from work," but "Rest in working"? If the latter, it is, we may humbly hope, of the nature of that comfort in which, when the Churches walked, they were multiplied as well as edified.

3. Finally, we shall regard a time of outward tranquillity as one peculiarly favourable to the exercise of Christ's ministry. And when I speak of Christ's ministry, I desire to include in that description not only an official but a personal service; quite as much the ministry of her whose humble leisure was filled with almsdeeds for Christ's poor, as of him who "passed through all quarters" ready

to heal the sick or to reanimate the dead. How ungrateful is it if, because God casts our lot in quiet times, we are to enjoy a selfish and thankless ease, doing nothing for Him and nothing for our brethren; nothing to spread the knowledge of Christ, or to draw others, at our own doors, in our own homes, to follow Him! What are we doing—let each one ask himself, let each one ask herself, What am I doing—to show my thankfulness for the blessings and the hopes of a Christian? If nothing else, am I at least caring for the poor? There are those who feel themselves unequal to any other, any more directly spiritual source. Then let them begin with this. Let them, in the privacy of home, work, like this Christian woman, for Christ's poor. Instead of saying, all through life, to the needy, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," let them see what little can be done, in their own kitchen or by their own hand's toil, to procure, for a few at least, "those things which are needful for the body." And let them consecrate every such offering by humble self-abasing prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let their own hope and faith rest firmly on Him. So when they come to die, if not mourned, like her of whom we have read to-night, by the tears of many who have here lived by their bounty, at least they may have Him with them Whose love can illuminate even death and the grave, and Whose voice shall at last be heard in the darkness and stillness of each separate sepulchre, saying, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead": yea, "come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Complementary Forces in the Christian Life

BY REV. W. L. WATKINSON, D.D.

"Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judæa," &c.—Acts ix. 31.

We are apt to regard these two forces—fear and consolation—as contradictory, and when we can distinguish the two actions simultaneously within us we infer that our state is not exactly what it ought to be. The passage before us throws much light upon this phase of experience, and by its aid some of our perplexities may be resolved.

"The fear of the Lord" marks an abiding characteristic of the Christian life. The central idea of this expression is: the fear which dwelt in our Lord Himself must dwell in His disciples. "The mind which was in Christ," must be ours in this particular also. We know what is meant by "the beauty of the Lord" being upon us, and in a similar sense we must understand "the fear of the Lord" being in us. Christ was no stranger to fear. "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." What was the nature of this fear expressed by our Lord? The passage undoubtedly refers to the special anxiety and distress exhibited by Christ in connection with His passion and approaching death; but the reason given for the prevalence of His supplications, namely, "and was heard in that He feared," refers to the permanent habit of the Master's mind. Christ was penetrated by a sense of religious awe and conscientiousness; He was delicately alive to the will of His Heavenly Father; He had an acute sympathy with whatever was venerable and holy; He had a quick sensibility to discover unrighteousness, and an unutterable shrinking from its contact; and because of this conscientiousness and circumspection He had power with God and prevailed. There was no other fear

of God in Jesus Christ, but only the deepest love and confidence. This sensibility to the will of God and purpose of God must be in us. "The fear of the Lord," like the love of the Lord, or the glory of the Lord, is to be participated in by His disciples, and is altogether a noble thing. It is an anxious state of mind lest we should wound the love of God, violate the law of righteousness, or fail to reach the highest sanctification of character. "Perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment"; but perfect love does not cast out *this* fear, which is inseparable indeed from the rarest blessedness. In this fear the primitive Christian walked, and in this fear all true believers walk. Having been made to know and love the holiness of God, we must watch over ourselves with trembling solicitude so that we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God," that we fulfil all righteousness, walk in all Christ's steps, and be fit at last to see God's face. "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, Who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

"The comfort of the Holy Ghost" is also an indispensable element in our spiritual life. The first disciples enjoyed the inspiration and encouragement of the Spirit of God, and all disciples share in the same privilege. Scholars differ as to the propriety of characterizing the Spirit of God as the "Comforter"; some wishing to retain the appellation as in the Authorized Version, others excluding this signification altogether, and rendering it "Helper," "Advocate." The truest view is, that the Greek word our translators have rendered by *Comforter* has a rich fulness which no single term can exhaust. The Spirit is both Helper and Comforter. Olshausen remarks: "The idea of comfort implies that of efficient succour"; and we may add, the idea of efficient succour implies that of comfort. We cannot agree with Dr. Bushnell, that "the very poorest, thinnest representation ever proposed, or adopted for the name given by our Saviour to the Spirit, is our English name Comforter." This name must not be regarded as suggesting earthly comforts, as expressing feeble over-soft sympathy, as in a soothing key, but as suggestive of the deep satisfaction which is imparted to the soul by the indwelling presence and energy of the Spirit of God. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of "*strong* consolation," and such consolation or encouragement is specially inspired by the royal Spirit.

The primitive Christians felt this consolation and walked in its power. Whilst painfully conscious of the presence and possibilities of sin both around them and within them, they watched over themselves with a jealous and unrelaxing vigilance, and were energized and comforted by the power and grace of the Holy Ghost. Great and sorrowful as was the conflict into which they were plunged, they felt the Spirit of God unfolding in their soul a banner which promised matchless strength and glorious victory. Some praise the heathenism of antiquity because, amid all its absurdities, it was a cheerful religion; the song, the dance and the banquet intermingled with its rites, and sacrifices were preludes to well-spread tables and social repasts, whether on occasions of public rejoicing, or in the hilarious communions of private hospitality. Now it must be acknowledged that Christianity is not a "cheerful religion" in the sense in which Greek and Roman worship was *cheerful*. Jesus Christ brought out the deeper meaning of life; and we have, morally speaking, far deeper reasons for seriousness than men could possibly feel prior to the Advent. Christ has immensely exalted our conception of God, of His love and holiness; of the Divine capacity of our nature; of the spirituality, breadth and inviolability of the law; and of the vast issues of human character and conduct. The superficial hilarity of pagan worship was an impossibility to those who knew the Holy One of Israel, who had seen the awful

beauty of Christ, and who were expecting the manifestation of that perfect universe into which nothing can enter that defileth. But, on the other hand, if Christ has intensified our conception of the momentousness of life by declaring its solemn obligations and vast consequences, He has given us such reasons for bravery and hope in the moral life as men never knew before. Do we fear lest we fail to realize the wondrous love of God? "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost Which is given unto us." Do we tremble lest we fail to recognise the mind of God? "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." Are we afraid to present ourselves before God's pure presence? "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Do we shrink to contemplate the wide gulf which comes between us and the perfection of our Father in Heaven? The Spirit assures us of sonship, and animates us to reach that "beauteous light" which we see from far. Do we feel our unfitness for "the holy city," and tremble lest we lose the great future? The Spirit gives us the earnest of the promised inheritance, and urges us forward to share in God's everlasting glory and blessedness. The hope and fear of the human heart have alike been quickened and intensified by Christ: but encouragement, helpfulness, hopefulness, are the special features of His Gospel.

So far from these two phases of experience being incompatible, they are really complementary. The "fear of the Lord" and "the comfort of the Holy Ghost" are correlatives by whose joint action the believer is built up. In nature apparently contradictory elements and forces blend, and in blending produce the grandest or fairest results. Widely as oxygen and nitrogen differ they are really complementary gases, and combined in due proportions make the sweet and vital atmosphere. Attraction and repulsion are also complementary forces whose combined action preserves the universe in harmonic movement. So the resultant of the double action of the heart is life and health. Forces, laws and elements apparently antagonistic are really complementary, and from their combined action spring the glories and music of creation. Thus is it in Christian experience. The two states of mind distinguished in the text are not mutually exclusive, but co-factors in the culture of the spirit. Fear is not inconsistent with peace. "Then had the Churches rest, . . . walking in the fear of the Lord." Fear is not inconsistent with love. The disciple of love fell at his Master's feet as dead. Fear is not inconsistent with hope. Peter who has so much to say about the terrible day of the Lord, is full of hope. Fear is not inconsistent with the highest world and the fullest felicity. Those who stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of gold, sing: "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou art holy." And so "comfort" is not inconsistent with any grace of the Spirit, with any noble element of character, with any conscientiousness of life. An anxious thoughtfulness and a full assurance; a constant eye to the imperative ideal which is so far above us, and to the glorious grace dwelling so richly in us; a vivid sense of our high and holy calling, and of the dangerous path of pilgrimage which leads up to it; the recollection of "the jealous God," and of the God "keeping mercy for thousands"; the anticipation of judgment and glory, are co-ordinate and co-operative moods in the working out of our salvation. The danger lies in the omission of either. How faulty the piety in which fear has no place! in which there is no trembling before the holiness of God, no shamefacedness, no suffering sensitiveness lest we err or fall, no overwhelming sense of the gravity of our position, no gazing with awe into the dread eternity how surely mine! Lacking this element we can cherish no true view of the preciousness of Christ and His salvation; we attain no depth of character;

and even our joy itself is a thin and frothy sentiment. The brighter the star, the more it trembles ; and the purest saints, the bravest heroes of all times, have stood "in fear and in much trembling." Not less faulty is the piety in which comfort has no place—legal, tormenting, morbid religiousness ! In a life where solace disputes no authority fear becomes servile and abject, crushing the finer instincts of the heart, souring the disposition, depriving the spirit of all spontaneity, freedom and brightness, and producing the narrowest and hardest form of character. Pale sorrow must consort with blooming joy ; weakness must lean on strength ; sweet comfort must soothe awesome fear ; mercy and truth must meet together ; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Only in the reconciliation of these antagonisms, in the marriage of these contrarieties, in the equilibrium of these opposite forces, do we attain the fulness of life and the fulness of its blessing. Our grandest moments arise in the union of two opposing emotions. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place ; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place ! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." "And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy : and did run to bring His disciples word."

Whilst we cultivate both sentiments, we must maintain both in due proportions. The danger is not perhaps great that we should entirely disregard either fear or hopefulness ; but most of us are under temptation to yield this sentiment or that undue pre-eminence. The reason we exaggerate one or other sentiment is sometimes found in our constitution, and again in our circumstances. To exaggerate the sentiment of fear is the peril of some. An old writer tells us of a strange tribe which dwelt in caves because they were afraid of the sunshine ; many devout people are afraid of the sunshine of the mind. These apprehensive ones are transfixed with awe before the holiness and glory of the Throne ; the mount that burned with fire holds them with a strong fascination ; they shrink from the awful loveliness of Christ ; the day in which God shall "judge the world in righteousness" is ever before their imagination. Such are burdened with a sense of imperfection, of condemnation, of peril, and are slow to consider the gracious aspects of the Divine character, the love and pity of the Redeemer, the "exceeding great and precious promises," the inspiring and mighty aid of the Comforter. Let those of a certain temperament watch against this danger. All excess of fearfulness is fatal so far to the freedom, strength and joyfulness of the soul. Let God lead you into green pastures ; do not be afraid to "feed among the lilies" ; open your heart to the full noon of God's face ; "abound in hope," and you shall find yourself more than conqueror. Joy and hope had a full share in the pure-hearted Christianity of Pentecost ; "They continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." We are called to be partners in like precious gladness. The peril of others lies in exaggerating the element of comfort. These chiefly ponder the element phases of religion, and remember that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" ; they are much oftener found at Olivet than at Sinai ; they dwell more on the promises of Christ than on His requirements ; they much more naturally think of Heaven than of the Day of Judgment. Those need to be reminded of the sterner side of things, and of the pressing need to "stand in awe, and sin not." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God Who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The grandest fact in our favour ought to fill us with sacred solicitude, namely, that God dwells in us in renewing and saving power.

We ought to fear lest we should grieve such love, lest we should fail of salvation after such gracious aid. "Rejoice with trembling."

We must not miss the teaching of the passage before us, as it exhibits fear and comfort, not as alternative, but as co-existent and concurrent moods of the soul. At one and the same time the primitive Christians walked "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." There ought to be a constant interaction of the two sentiments; the two streams ought to mingle in one full tide of feeling. "Happy is the man that feareth alway," and blessed is he also who rejoices evermore, and in everything gives thanks. In the geologic world, for distinct and protracted periods, different gases prevailed; now you have the Carboniferous Epoch, and then some other element predominates; but in the perfected earth the various gases mingle in due proportions, and the life and beauty of the whole orb are secured and perpetuated. In the cruder and more imperfect stages of our religious history, periods of anxiety are succeeded by periods of jubilation, weeks or months of sadness by spaces of brilliant hope; but in the higher and riper development of the soul there is more simultaneousness in our moods, and they happily mingle in one deep and rich experience. We are sometimes perplexed and humbled at the apparent confusion of our soul—brightness and shadow, joy and grief, love and awe, confidence and apprehension, so strangely intermixed. But we really have no reason to be disheartened by this miscellaneousness and seeming heterogeneousness of experience. In the Psalms we frequently find the most rapid transitions of thought, the mingling of most diverse emotion: mercy and judgment celebrated in one breath, gladness suddenly becoming thoughtful, and again sorrow smiling through her tears. And the same comprehensive experience finds expression in the New Testament. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." So far from deprecating this interaction of ideas, this transfusion of feeling, this concomitance of manifold moods, we must regard it with complacency as God's wonder-working order, and direct our self-culture accordingly. The same day ought to find us at Sinai and Calvary, gauging the power of sin and the power of grace, singing of mercy and of judgment, gazing with desire into the world of glory domed over us and looking with dread into the realm of ruin yawning under us. The artist ranges over the whole chromatic scale, and makes his picture so grand because the colours are so skilfully mixed, the massive glooms and golden lights so finely contrasted; the musician rapidly passes from key to key, from one stop to another, and because he does so creates commanding music; thus in the believer's life it is the constant concurrent appeal to law and grace, to duty and promise, to responsibility and privilege, to the God of righteousness and the God of love, to Heaven near and Heaven distant, that finally gives to the character that full and finished beauty of which all artistic perfection is but the coarse figure.

The concurrence of these two habits of feeling secures the highest welfare of the soul. It was whilst the first Churches walked in this fear and comfort that they were "edified" and "multiplied." The truest condition of Christian life is not found in the comparative absence of feeling. The Scripture before us implies immense feeling; it represents the soul as full of force and movement and conflict. Some old writers held the conceit that the earth before the Flood

was entirely devoid of undulations—no towering mountains, no deep valleys, but the planet everywhere as smooth as a globe of glass. A uniform experience—one which excludes powerful counteractive sentiments—is thought by some a satisfactory sign. The truth is far otherwise. The uniformity predicated of the pre-Noahic earth is surely no desirable thing. How much grandeur would be lost to the world if the mountains were levelled, how much fruitfulness also! These undulations play a vast and beneficent part in the economy of nature, in the regulation of winds and rivers, and they have plants and animals all their own which naturalists would be sorry to miss; they almost play as great a part in the story of the race as they do in physical geography, standing forth in history as they stand above the plains; and one of the prime founts of poetry would be sealed if we should behold no more those gigantic ridges with their sunset-nimbus, those pinnacles bathed in purple and gold one hour and the next terrible with cloud and fire, those white tops on which “pauses the morning star.” Somewhat thus is it with the soul. Our ideal experience must not be a tame uniformity, which really bespeaks the absence of deep life and feeling. The true soul is full of great contending emotions, the upheavals and subsidences caused by the Spirit Who worketh in us mightily; and in the exaltations and humiliations of the mind, in the soaring hopes and lowly fears, in the confidence which touches the heights and the apprehensions which reach the depths, lies the perfecting of the soul. Let us not reckon that state most desirable in which we are least moved and exercised, least agitated and perplexed; the more life the more feeling, the more feeling the more life.

In an experience which contains the full measure and compass of feeling we secure the stability of the soul. The architect builds his lighthouse on a rock, and builds a fabric very much like the rock in solidity and strength; yet it is essential there should be flexibility in the massive masonry, or it would be utterly insecure. The perfect lighthouse is a mighty column rising out of the rock, the very ideal of strength; yet it is a reed shaken with the wind, and because it bends it stands. It is thus with the highest and safest characters. There must be in us strength—strength of mind, of principle, of faith—or it is impossible that we should bear the strain of life. We must have great faith in God, boldness in prayer, and a mighty hope of final conquest and inheritance. And yet with all this there must be that sensitiveness which is ever the sign of sublimest strength. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” “Be not highminded, but fear.”

An Apostolic Tour of Inspection

BY REV. J. OSWALD DYKES, D.D.

“It came to pass that Peter, passing through all quarters,” &c.—Acts ix. 32-43.

Out of St. Peter's journey of apostolic inspection, only two incidents have been preserved, one at Lydda and one at Joppa. It is plain, however, that his tour may have embraced a considerable tract of country before he arrived at Lydda. That town lay only some eighteen miles from the capital on the direct road to Cæsarea; but it could not have been his first halt, for we are told that he arrived there while he was passing through among all the saints. It is probable enough that he had already visited the central highlands, or even Samaria and Galilee, before he turned back to overtake the coast plain. There, however, the interest of his tour culminated. Between the limestone hills which form the backbone of Palestine, and the Mediterranean Sea, stretches from north to south a long,

rich, fat, and in ancient times well-peopled plain. Only at two points of the sea-board is this continuous flat of deep loam broken by a sudden spur of rock. The one is at Carmel, the other at Joppa. The portion of coast plain which lies betwixt these two was called as here "the Sharon"; the city of Casarea being about midway between the two extremities of it: while the part lying to the south of Joppa as far as Gaza, bears in Holy Writ another name which our version has not preserved but translated, the name of "Shephelah." Like Sharon, that word means simply, "plain." It is the plain of Philistia. Now, almost due inland from the low rock on which the conspicuous and unmistakable port-town of Joppa has stood so long, is this small town of Lydda (now Lud), girdled with olives. It stands quite near the base of the hill-country where you drop down upon the plain through the passes of Benjamin.

If Lydda was the first of all the thick-set villages of the flat country to be visited by St. Peter, as it well might be, then it is easy to see how the fame of a miracle done there upon a confirmed paralytic, would naturally spread from one rural hamlet to another across the ten unbroken miles to Joppa, and along the main Roman road as far northward as Casarea or farther. Its effect upon the population is pithily described as both extensive and deep. For us it is difficult to realise the part which miracle-working appears to have played in the early diffusion of the Gospel. Not only does it seem to moderns as if hardly any miracle could be so well authenticated as really to be accepted by the public at large; one fails no less to realise that state of mind in which a person could be led through any spiritual or moral revolution, even by a miracle which he did accept. The first of these difficulties is lightened indeed when we duly estimate how unlike were the views of a first century Jew to those of a present-day Englishman on this matter of the supernatural. The Jew was prepared to expect divine communications, and he expected no divine communication without a visible or tangible miracle. His national history was full of such interpositions; the hopes of his race demanded their recurrence. Our Lord accordingly found no scepticism among the people as to the reality of His wonders. Whatever party spite might allege as to their source, in respect of their actual occurrence He found easy credence and an appetite for them only too gross. But the second point is more difficult. What relation is there between crediting the bare fact of a miracle and being morally converted to genuine penitence or trust? Here the experience of our Lord's ministry affords us no assistance. He did not win followers through wonder-working. He won popularity, not success. He drew crowds but not hearts. Yet in the case of this man Eneas at Lydda, a general conversion of the agricultural population in the Sharon plain is stated to have been the immediate result—a conversion so general that Luke can employ a popular hyperbole and say, they "all turned to the Lord." The explanation of this unusual success lay, as I am disposed to think, in the circumstances of the plain-population. So far as we are informed, our Lord had never visited that district. Whatever the people may have known of Him in other ways, they were less hardened against His claims by previous familiarity with and rejection of them, than either the Galileans or the Judæans. It was like virgin soil therefore, and recent evangelism by such scattered disciples as Philip, who resided at Casarea, had already prepared the ground. Before Peter's visit many among the devout country people must have been aware of the tenets of the new sect and predisposed to accept Jesus as Messiah, who had not yet decided to join the little nuclei of converts meeting here and there for worship. On such susceptible villagers the falling of this single spark sufficed to set the country in a blaze.

However this may be, it was the knowledge of Jesus' great favour shown to

Eneas through the word of Peter, which brought the Apostle a pressing invitation from the saints at Joppa. On the humble little Church in that town there had come in those days a serious loss. Acute observers of moral changes in history have remarked how Christianity suddenly shifted the supreme type of character from the masculine to the feminine virtues. In the pagan world, "virtue" itself meant simply manfulness. It was the combination in the perfect Man Himself of all those graces which formerly had been deemed womanish or weak, such graces as humility, meekness, tenderness, and serving charity, with that stately group of virtues which made up the antique ideal—foresight, fortitude, justice, and self-control: it was this combination in Jesus which rectified the judgment of humanity and restored to us a symmetrical image of character. To effect such a rectification, however, it was needful to lift into special prominence the hitherto despised graces of femininity. Manliness in Jesus is everywhere taken for granted; womanliness in its best sense is made conspicuous. The Cross of the Man of Sorrows confutes the ancient preferences of the world. It is the glorification of self-sacrifice, of gentleness, of endurance, and of meek forgiveness. One immediate result of this was not only to foster a fuller development of all such beauties of character as belong most eminently to womanhood, the quiet and lowly spirit, chaste modesty, and silent loving patience; but also to give scope within the Christian Church for the true functions of woman. With the birth of Christian beneficence came the recognition of woman's work. Shut out from office in the State, woman found for the first time within the Church a sheltered and becoming sphere for all truly womanlike services. While Jesus yet lived, she found her sphere in ministering to His personal comforts. After He was gone, she found it still in ministering to Christ in the persons of His poor ones. Doing it to them for His sake, she still was able to do it unto Him. At least two female orders can be traced in the obscure arrangements of the primitive Church: the order of deaconesses and the order of widows; of which the one organised, and the other rewarded, the Christian labours of faithful women.

To that small congregation at Joppa belongs the honour of having contributed the first female name to the records of Christian service. She, whom the people called, both in their homely Aramaic and in their Greek speech, by the name of "the Gazelle," because that loveliest of Syrian animals was from early times, to the amatory poets of the East, a favourite emblem of a beautiful woman, has fitly bequeathed her name of Dorcas to express, not the gift of personal beauty in her sex, but the Christian ornament of meek and gracious charity. Dorcas was no deaconess; the age of Church organisation had not yet come; but whatever she was, maid or widow, she had learned of Jesus Christ her Lord His best lesson, and was enough of a woman to discover how she could most fitly practise it. By quiet feminine handiwork it was her wont to work for Christ. Among the desolate and friendless of her own sex she found suitable objects for her unobtrusive aid.

Her death was to the saints of Joppa a common grief. It brought out for the first time how much she had been to them. It was not the widows only who missed their benefactress, but the whole congregation lost one who was to them a "living epistle" of Jesus Christ. They seem to have conceived some hope that the loss might not prove a final one. Was not Christ's chief Apostle within a dozen miles of them, and had not Jesus just been showing on the paralysed limbs of Eneas that, though absent, He could still work as in the years when He lived with men? Might not a courteous but urgent message bring into the midst of themselves the organ of divine life and power? and might not the Lord hear in pity His bereaved saints? It is hardly to be supposed that Peter accompanied

the deputation back to Joppa with any certain knowledge what it might please his Master to do for the mourning Church. But when he stood beside the dead in the centre of that touching group who wailed in the upper chamber and pointed to the very clothes they were wearing as evidences of the greatness of their loss, he felt shut up at least to carry to his Master the petition of His people. Having imitated the behaviour of Jesus in the house of Jairus, by putting them all forth he imitated the behaviour of Elijah in an upper room at Zarephath, by crying unto the Lord. As he had said to Eneas, "Jesus Christ healeth thee," so now he begged Jesus Christ to revive dead Dorcas: for it is Jesus Christ—the Master—Who alone saves autocratically at His choice; Peter, and all other servants, only ministerially, as their Divine Lord enables them. Still, therefore, it is the very life of Jesus, poured through His Christian members, which giveth life to the world. While Peter prayed alone in the awful silence of death, that incommunicable secret assurance of faith in which must have always lain the authority of any man to attempt a miracle, possessed his soul, and enabled him with calmness to do, what, without it, only insanity could have done—to speak to the cold corpse these words, "Tabitha, arise."

This is the second recorded death within the Christian community. In Jerusalem, a young man, a public officer of the Church, and a foremost witness to Jesus in high places, died beneath the stones of his enemies. At Joppa, a lonely, unobtrusive woman expired in the quiet of her own sick room. Both in Stephen and in Dorcas the life of Christ was seen to vanquish death. That was not death, as men count dying, to "fall asleep" with the face of Jesus full in sight, and His voice of welcome already beginning to be heard. Neither is this death, as men have hitherto known it, when dead Dorcas quietly opens eyes which seemed to have shut for ever, to find an Apostle kneeling by her bed. Henceforth it is not Christian to fear a foe which our Lord Christ hath so plainly bound. Let it be remembered, too, that Stephen's victory was a better one than that of Dorcas; and Stephen's is the victory which may be ours. It has not been granted to many of the saints to return, and calmly to resume, like her, their wonted tasks of earthly ministration. It would be no kindness if it were. To depart, in St. Paul's judgment, is far better. Whereas to all saints who seek the grace of faith for dying need, it will be granted to fall asleep as Stephen did in the serenity of Christian hope, and to pass like him from the shadows of the valley to the face of God.

The restoration of Dorcas to her weeping widows, through so rare and signal an act of power, was probably a seal set of purpose by the Lord on that new department of charitable labour within His Church which Dorcas had made so much her own. To the Church, rather than to Dorcas, was the kindness done, when one who was so "needful" was suffered to "abide" a little longer in the flesh. The widows were comforted; all Christian ages have learnt how the Master values the humble and retiring industry of devout women when it clothes Christ's poor by its own needle; while through a splendid demonstration of what divine strength lay concealed behind the diviner charity of Christ's ministering Church, many souls in Joppa and elsewhere "believed in the Lord."

Christ Present to Heal

FROM "THE WEEKLY PULPIT."

"Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," &c.—Acts ix. 34.

"Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." These words must have sounded very strangely to those who first heard them. And indeed, if we think about them, and try to realise their significance, they come to sound very strangely to us.

"Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Why, surely, Jesus Christ was not there. No eye of Christ rested on that sufferer. No voice of Christ spoke to that sufferer. The footfall of the Lord Jesus had not been heard within that dwelling. The Jesus of Bethesda, and Nain, and Capernaum was *not there*.

A looker-on might even say "Jesus Christ is dead. Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Have you not heard the sad story; how, urged on by the priestly party, the leaders of the nation dragged Him before the Governor, and implored His death even at the price of their own blood? Have you not heard how weak Pilate surrendered Him to His enemies, and had Him nailed to a cross: how they pierced His side, and proved Him dead: how a few friends begged His body, wrapped it hurriedly in spices, and buried it?"

And what is it for a man to be *dead*? It means that the life-story is finished; the life-powers are done. No more can that man's love cheer another heart; never again can the flashings of that man's mind illuminate another soul; never again can that man's energy be put into another deed of holy charity. If a man is dead, his power is ended: the fragrance of his character may live on; the influence of his words and works may remain: but he himself is done, his personal work is finished. The world has buried with tears many a wise teacher, because it knew that he could teach no more. The world has grieved for many a skilful physician, because it knew that he could heal no more. And Christ is *dead*, is *buried*. Why then try to delude this poor sufferer, by speaking thus of one who is dead, and saying, "Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole!"

But St. Peter would have answered firmly and well. He would have said, "Jesus Christ is *not dead*." He speaks with a living voice, saying, "I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the Keys of Hades and of death." It is true that He *died*, but it is even more true that He *liveth*. It is true that He hung upon a Cross, but it is even more true that He is crowned with many crowns. It is true that He filled a real man's grave, but it is even more true that He now fills a royal throne. It is true that they rolled a real stone to the sepulchre door, and sealed it with the governor's seal, but it is even more true that, "vain were stone, or watch, or seal," to hold in the rising Lord of Life. Since the white cloud passing over Olivet received Him, and hid Him from human sight, Stephen has beheld Him glorified, John has seen Him, and Paul has seen Him, with the eye of sense; and thousands of the holiest and best of men have seen Him with the eye of faith; and *that*, if we thought aright, we should regard as a kind of vision, surer, and truer, and clearer than any bodily sight can be. There is no truth more fully assured than this, "Jesus *lives*," and lives in the full energy and activity of His glorified humanity. And what is it for a man to be *alive*? It is to have him with us, to help and guide, and comfort and bless. Getting nearer to him, we may see his face glow, and hear his heart beat. Bringing our difficulties to him, we may have his hand outstretched for our help. Then, if Jesus is alive, for evermore, all His powers and grace are actually with us, and St. Peter may say to palsied Eneas, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole."

But it may yet be urged, that if Christ is alive, still He is not *here*. He may be alive in Heaven, but this is earth. He may be working out purposes of mercy amid Angels and Archangels, and the spirits of the redeemed, but this is a scene of mere human conflicts, and He is not here. One of our most real difficulties is to be satisfied that the Christ of the glory can be a present power in our human lives. How often we brood wonderingly over it—Christ in the glory, Christ here. Christ exalted above all principality and power. Christ with me. Eyes do not see Him, yet He is here. Hands may not touch Him, yet He is here. Ears are

too coarse to detect the sound of His voice, yet He is here. How can these things be?

There are some, indeed, who can scarcely see the difficulty. If they do, they settle it at once, or fancy they settle it. They say to us: "You see Christ *Himself* is in Heaven, but His influence is here. His power is here, His spirit is here, His thoughts and interest are here, abiding ever with us." But that kind of answer cannot, will never, satisfy our hearts. We do not want to know where Christ's influence can be felt, we want to know where Christ Himself is, and how He Himself can be present with us. It is so easy to take the charm out of your holy religion, by making out everything to be "influence." To some, indeed, God Himself has come to be only an "influence," keeping everything in its place and order, like the force of gravitation in the material universe, and not a real, living Being, to Whom our allegiance, and service, and love, are due. Jesus Christ was once real—these men will say—when He had a mortal body, but now He is only an influence, acting on our motives, and our plans, and our judgments. The Holy Ghost, they will say, is no living personality, but only a kind of force, working in the sphere of the thoughts and affections.

Now, what we need to realise, and yet find it so difficult to realise, is, that the only *true* being is *spiritual* being. The spiritual God is a truer being than we are with our bodies, which we may handle. Jesus Christ in Heaven—glorified as we say—is a truer being, more really a living being, than He was in the days when He was limited by mortal flesh. St. Paul writes as if he could be almost indifferent about those days in the flesh, when he realised the spiritual and eternal life of his divine Lord. He even says, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth know we Him (thus) no more." And since we are spiritual beings—our soul life being our true life—the living, spiritual Christ can come to our spirit, can be present with our real selves, can be recognised and communed with, more truly than when He came near to human bodies, within the vision of human eyes, and the hearing of human ears. We understand well, how two bodies can come into contact and fellowship: then try and understand also how two spirits may come into contact; and the one spirit may be weak, dependent, needy—yes, even suffering under disabilities and limitations, for the very reason that it is imprisoned in a weak, and trembling bodily frame; and the other spirit may be a strong, loving, glorious spirit, all the better able to comfort, cheer, inspire and strengthen, that it is not imprisoned in a body, and yet has powers over the body. Now *such* a present spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ, and St. Peter is at the very heart of the truth when he says to Eneas, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." A Christ Who is absent from us in body, can be near as a glorified Spirit. And another Apostle can speak thus of Him,—“In Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing (that is, seeing Him with the vision of the soul) we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

The striking thing in the incident connected with our text is the emphatic declaration of St. Peter, that Christ was actually there in the room, and there with divine power to heal. Then we enquire:

1. WHAT ARE THE EYES THAT CAN SEE SUCH A PRESENT CHRIST?—It is quite proper to say that St. Peter *saw* Jesus Christ there, and equally proper to say that Eneas *saw* Jesus Christ there. We value so highly the faculties of our bodily eyes, that we are liable to take up the notion that there is no other vision for us than that which our eyes can give. Yet we should be poor creatures if we could see no more than bodily eyes gazed on. There are some striking illustrations in Holy Scripture of the weakness of our bodily vision, and of our power to see what our eye never looks on. Those riotous Sodomites had no idea *that* they

were blind ; they thought they saw ; and yet for hours together they wearied themselves in vain trying to find the door of Lot's house. The servant of Elisha could see, with his bodily eyes, only the hosts of the Syrians, gathering round the dwelling-place of the Prophet ; but when his truer eyesight was opened, he could see the mountains around them filled with the chariots and horsemen of Jehovah. When the company of Saul, the persecutor, were smitten down on the road to Damascus, we read of them, that they " heard a voice, but saw no man." Saul beheld the Lord Whom he was persecuting, exalted and glorified, and the sight humbled him to say, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do " ? There is a very touching incident narrated of the risen life of Jesus. He actually came up with, and joined two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. He walked with them, He talked to them, and they never guessed who He was. Their eyes—their bodily eyes—could not discern their Master and Saviour even when He stood at their side ; not until their inner sight was quickened did they look wonderingly into each other's faces, and say, " It was the Lord."

With what eyes, think you, did old Jewish Prophets see their visions ? With what eyes did St. Paul go up into the third Heaven, and see unspeakable things ? With what eyes did the beloved John in Patmos behold the exalted Christ, and the passing scenes of the long Christian ages ?

What is that eye of the Spirit that can bring Jesus near, though eighteen hundred years have passed since He put off this mortal tabernacle ? We call it sometimes *faith*. That is to the soul what the eye is to the body. It strains through the spiritual atmospheres, and makes real and clear spiritual objects. The man of faith has the most perfect right to say, *I see*. St. Peter's faith enables him to say " Jesus Christ is here, making thee whole." There is no need for us to ascend into Heaven, to bring Christ down from above ; no need to descend into the deep, to bring Christ up from below. Let only your soul look—obey the risen Christ's words, in their higher meanings—" anoint thine eyes with eye salve," and behold, the Word, the Christ is nigh unto thee.

II. WHAT IS THE CONDITION THAT MOST FULLY REALISES CHRIST'S PRESENCE ?—With earth-gladness over us, and human joys about us, and success attending all our doings, and health, with all world treasures, poured out at our feet, we may think that we can do without Christ. Many a strong, hale, hearty, happy man came near the human Christ, and had no feeling that he needed Him. " They that be whole have no need of the physician, but they that be sick." But the suffering, the poor, the halt, the maimed, the lame, and the blind wanted Christ, sought Him, found Him, saw Him, and obtained His blessing. It was palsied Eneas who could see the Spiritual Christ, and feel His healing power. It is always *need* that opens soul eyes. It is poverty, sense of danger, that quickens spirit vision. Need is the eye salve of which the Risen Christ spoke ; more especially *spiritual need*, the sense of sin ; of separateness from God ; of palsied spiritual helplessness.

Do you need ? Is your soul empty, crying to be filled ? Is your soul diseased, and crying to be healed ? Is your soul imperilled, and crying to be saved ? Then your spirit's eye is opening, and I may speak of Christ to you, the present Christ, present to save—the same as He Whose gracious and beautiful life cheered the hearts and homes of Judæa, 1,800 years ago. The same, and yet different. The same in all grace, and tenderness, and power to heal ; different, in that He is glorified, altogether spiritual, and seen no more by the eye of sense

Tabitha

BY REV. JOHN FAWCETT, M.A.

"There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha," &c.—Acts ix. 36-42.

The name Tabitha or Dorcas, the one Syrian, the other Greek, signifies a kid. It would be idle to look for any correspondence between the name and the character, since the name was given when Tabitha was a child, and no character as yet developed. That character, however, when it did unfold itself, and had been formed by Divine grace, was the most glorious that a woman can possess. She was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Good works, whether in men or women, are the proper fruits of faith and evidences of salvation. By these the tree is known to be a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. But with respect to women, especially, good works are mentioned in Scripture in a way very striking and very appropriate. In the selection of widows, after directing that none should be taken into the number under the age of sixty years, and having been the wife of one man, the Apostle further requires that she should be "well reported of for good works, if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work." These are the proper employments, and I may add, proper ornaments of Christian women.

It is natural to the sex to be studious of ornament: and both Paul and Peter recognize this natural propensity in the exhortations which they give to women on this subject. Hear St. Paul—"I will that women adorn themselves with modest apparel, with shame-facedness and sobriety," &c. So St. Peter: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair," &c. In this way the holy women who trusted in God always adorned themselves. In this way Sarah adorned herself; and in this way Dorcas. A woman thus adorned is lovely not only in the sight of men, but in the sight of God Himself. He Who regards not the comeliness of outward form, or the splendour of costly attire, is well pleased with the beauties of holiness.

And what a contrast is there between the vain giddy female, who lavishes all that she possesses on her own person; and while she squanders large sums in expensive finery, has scarcely anything to spare for the fatherless and the widow, never visits the abodes of penury, and knows not how the poor live. What a contrast, I say, is there between this thoughtless selfish creature and the Christian lady who economizes perhaps a much smaller income that she may have to give to the sick and needy; who spends sparingly on herself that she may impart freely to others; whose face is well known in the habitations of the poor, and whose coming is always hailed with pleasure, even if she have nothing to give, because she can always give her sympathy, her kind words, her Christian admonitions and encouragements, adding, it may be, her heartfelt prayers. Can it be doubted, for a moment, whether of the two characters is the most lovely? Which would a Christian man wish his own wife or his own daughter to be?

Let those females who desire to be such look at the example in the text. Let them look at Dorcas, she was "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did"; and when Peter came to the house where she lay dead, the weeping widows showed him "the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." It seems this good woman had not only given her money, such as she had to give, but her labour too. She not only purchased the materials, but with

her own hands made them up into coats and garments. It is delightful to see the fingers of charity thus employed. And with much thankfulness I acknowledge that there are many females among us who thus employ themselves ; and that this parish is nearly pervaded with visitors, chiefly, though not entirely, of that sex, who leave not one humble dwelling at which they do not call, unless repulsed in the prosecution of their labour of love. The object, however, which they have before them is not the distributing of alms, or relieving the bodily wants of the poor. Almsgiving may be an incidental, perhaps not rare accompaniment ; but the direct object is higher. I have said that the system is well nigh filled up ; yet there are a few posts vacant ; and, were it not so, I would still urge others to come forward that there might always be a corps of reserve to draw upon in case of the sickness, or absence, or—as in the case of Dorcas—the death of any of the visitors.

And now having mentioned the visitors, I will address a few words to them, and to those who may be disposed to join their number ; and also to such as engage in like good works unconnected with any society. In doing this I will make a supposition very far from the truth. Suppose that Dorcas, while she abounded in those good works and almsdeeds which she did, while she visited the poor, and made them coats and garments, was not altogether consistent in her other practice—suppose, for instance, that she considered those good deeds as meritorious, that she depended upon them as her righteousness, and was proud of them ; or that she did them to be seen of men, and to be praised for them ; or suppose that, while she was kind abroad, she indulged evil tempers at home—should we in this case call Dorcas a saint ? Should we not say that she had no reward for her alms of her Father Who is in Heaven ; and that if even she gave all her goods to feed the poor, seeing it was evident that she had not charity, she was nothing ?

O, my dear friends, who engage in these good works, see that you do all from Christian principles, and that you be consistent. When you have done all these things, let the feeling of your hearts evermore be, “ We are unprofitable servants, we have done what was our duty to do.” Live always by the faith of Jesus Christ. Let Him be the ground of all your peace of conscience, of all your hope towards God ; and never be content with any work you do, except so far as it is done from love to Him, and for His sake. And O, as you value His honour in the world, and would not have His name blasphemed, look to it, that these fair fruits be not disfigured by perverse dispositions or unseemly conduct in other respects ; that your most intimate friends, and they of your households, may not see in you selfishness, or vanity, or the spirit of slander, or a passionate ungoverned temper. Let your good works abroad be followed up by humility, meekness, charity, truth at home. Let the very image of Him Whose name you bear be manifest upon you ; and that it may be so, seek to receive from Him His own Spirit. Cultivate the religion of the closet ; be much in reading the Scriptures and in prayer. Thus must the secret spring be fed, the waters of which will run with a wholesome stream through all your walks of life. Then when you die your works will remain ; and the weeping poor and your weeping friends will show the coats and garments which you made while you were with them.

Thus acted the friends of Dorcas ; and thus they manifested that affection for her which we may in the second place consider. But why did they weep ? Were they doubtful about her state ? or, contrary to the opinion of Paul, did they think that to continue in the body was better than to depart and to be with Christ ? No : but goodness is so rare a thing that it can ill be spared in an evil world ; and wherever goodness is, it so wins the affections of those that are good, and binds one

to another in so close a union, that it cannot be severed without pain. The widows, therefore, while they showed the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them, wept at the thought that those hands should never be thus employed again; that those feet should never more go on their wonted errands of mercy; that they should never more behold the beaming of that countenance, nor hear the words of piety and kindness from those lips. And did they sin in thus weeping? They did not—at least they did not unless their weeping was excessive and unbelieving, which we have no right whatever to suppose. It is reasonable to believe that they sorrowed with a resigned feeling—not as those who had no hope, but as knowing that as “we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

Religion, it has been often said, and said very truly, was not intended to extinguish, but to regulate the feelings of nature. And however keen might be the grief which these mourners felt, that grief was duly regulated if they said—“The will of the Lord be done.” Nor was it any rebellion against that will if they asked Peter, whether, as he healed Eneas, he could not also raise Tabitha; nor if they sent for him from Lydda with that hope. Their doing so was no more rebellion than using medicine in the case of sickness is rebellion. It was employing means for the attainment of a certain end, knowing that it altogether depended on the good pleasure of God, whether those means should prosper or not. Their thus sending for Peter was an act of faith, nor was it in vain.

The miracle was wrought. The Apostle wrought it in the same name and by the same power as when he healed Eneas; but the method which he pursued was very different. When he healed Eneas it seems to have been in the presence of the sick man's friends. We do not hear that he prayed; and the words which he addressed to the sick man were—“Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” But in raising Tabitha he put forth the widows and saints, and was left alone with the body in the chamber of death. He then kneeled down and prayed. It was a great thing which he had to ask; and it required strong faith to expect that his request should be granted: for there before him lay the cold lifeless corpse: could he actually expect that those dead limbs should again be animated, and those closed eyes again open to the light of day? It was a hard thing: but nothing is too hard for the Lord. He had seen his Master raise from the dead the daughter of Jairus, the widow of Nain's son, and the brother of Mary and Martha. And that Master had promised—“He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father.”

He prayed, therefore, in hope; with what words we know not: perhaps as Elisha, when he raised the widow of Sarepta's son, cried, “O Lord, my God, I pray Thee let this child's soul come into him again.” So Peter might pray in like terms for Tabitha—earnest and importunate would be his prayer: nor did he rise from his knees without an assurance of success; for turning to the body, he said—“Tabitha, arise.” On the former occasion when he healed Eneas, he said, “Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” He does not now say, Tabitha, Jesus Christ restoreth thee to life, nor even mention Christ; but, as if speaking by his own authority, he says, “Tabitha, arise.” But did he not really work by the power of Christ, and work in as simple dependence on that power as in the former miracle? Surely he did. And hence we learn that though the Christian is to do whatever he does in word or deed in the name of Jesus Christ, yet it does not follow that he is always to express his doing so. He should always feel that he can do no good thing without Christ; but whether he should in any particular act make mention of the name of Christ may depend on circumstances.

Prayer particularly must always be in the name of Christ, that is, the believer must offer his prayers as being himself accepted in the Beloved, and therefore his services accepted also. And the earnest believing prayer which is offered in that name, expressed or not expressed, is still to this day effectual; and the believer may expect great things in answer to it. The child of God may cry to his Heavenly Father out of the greatest depths, and may hope to be lifted out of them. In seasons of adversity, when wave calleth unto wave, and when storms and billows of affliction pass over him, he may plead before God His own word, which stands pledged, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. Thus he may hope against hope; and when he is weak then he may be strong, assuring himself that what he has promised, God is able to perform.

The prayer of faith cannot indeed now be expected to raise the dead; but it may often restore the sick. Other means indeed should be used; the rules prescribed by the physician should be faithfully observed, and the medicines prescribed faithfully taken: but this does not prevent prayer from being added. No skill of the physician, or power of medicine, can succeed without the blessing of God. Prayer, therefore, for that blessing is one of the most material means to be used: and thus many a sick person may have been restored to health, who would otherwise have gone down to the chambers of death. But though, when once the soul has parted from the body, the dissolution is irreversible, and the severed union cannot be restored till the morning of the resurrection; yet there is a death, for the abolishing of which prayer may prevail.

There is a spiritual death as well as a natural death; and that spiritual death is a present death. Those who are under it are dead while they live. We are all under it by nature—dead in trespasses and sins. Those who have been quickened by the grace of Christ know that such once was their state. They have passed from death unto life: but they see many dear friends, respecting whom there is too much reason to fear that they abide still in death. This is a most painful feeling. Some of you may know it by experience. You may look at persons near to you in kindred and affection, amiable perhaps in many points, kind, correct in general conduct, in whom, nevertheless, you cannot see one single symptom of spiritual life. If you speak to them on other things they understand you, and are alive to what you say; speak to them on spiritual religion, and they have not a feeling on the subject. You see them altogether worldly in their taste, in their pursuits, in their choice of companions. There is nothing like a concern for their souls or like living a life of faith in the whole of their course. You see this—you cannot help seeing it—no blindness of love, no partiality of affection can hide it from you. Often do you sigh over them; and think, O what will become of this or that dear friend in eternity! You long to speak to them; but know not how; and, perhaps, if you attempted it, your speaking would be to no purpose, even though it should be taken kindly.

But one thing you can do—you can pray for them—you can enter into your chamber alone, and there pour out your supplications for them. On your bended knees, with fervent earnest supplications, you can call upon Him “Who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were.” And He can send forth His Spirit, and breathe upon those dead that they may live. Often—often has the prayer of faith been thus answered. Thus have godly parents rejoiced in the children of many prayers; and the prayers of children have been answered for parents. Ministers for their people, and people for their ministers, have not prayed in vain.

O that the Lord would pour upon us the Spirit of grace and of supplication, that we may all abound more in this holy exercise.

Dorcas

BY REV. WILLIAM ARNOT, D.D.

"There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha," &c. — Acts ix. 36-42.

The character and special work of Dorcas are full of interest and instruction for us. She was probably unmarried, for nothing is said of husband or of widowhood. She probably lived alone, for nothing is said of father or mother, sister or brother. She seems to have been one of those "honourable women," of whom not a few have arisen in every country and every age, who, having no family to care for, adopt the poor as their children, and in this form devote their time, and skill, and resources to the service of the Lord.

She was not a nun. In order to devote a life to the service of the poor, it is not necessary to renounce, by an irrevocable vow, the privileges, joys, and duties of family life. The relations and affections of nature are God's workmanship, and do not necessarily hinder any good work.

Dorcas was a disciple full of good works. One phrase indicates the well-spring, and the other indicates the refreshing stream that overflows. She was a "disciple"—behold the root! She was "full of good works"—behold the fruit-bearing branches! God hath joined these two; men should never and nowhere put them asunder. The one is faith, and the other good works. These two are beautiful in unity; but either wanting its mate "is dead, being alone."

People who have a smattering of religious knowledge, but have not been taught of the Spirit, fall alternately into two opposite errors in regard to the place and worth of good works in the Christian system. In the first instance the crude conception of self-righteousness springs up: Let me crowd in as many good deeds as I can, in order that I may thereby make my peace with God, and have a good case against the great day. But when this man hears the Gospel, and especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he begins to think that in this way of salvation there is no place left for a good life—that the Gospel is jealous, not zealous of good works.

When the work of the Spirit advances another step in his heart, when he is convinced of sin, and brought to the blood of Christ for pardon, this man gets a new view-point, and consequently a different view. Good works, as a justifying righteousness, he not only does not value, but loathes as filthy rags; yet, as fruit to his Redeemer's glory, he lives and labours in them all his days.

Such was the place of works both in the profession and the practice of this honourable woman. The branch was full of grapes, sweet, and ripe, and beautiful; but the branch was in the vine, and that accounts both for its beauty and its fertility.

When she was raised to life, they gave her back to the saints and widows. She was their property, and their property was restored. Such a working Christian belongs to the neighbourhood, and is their richest treasure. The work of Dorcas was personal. This is the most precious kind of benevolence, both to the giver and receiver. She knew each widow whom she clothed, each child whom she fed. Possibly she had not much money to bestow; but she contributed visits of sympathy, looks of love, and works of skill. There is no coin more welcome in the treasury of the Lord.

The coats and garments made by her hands, and exhibited by the poor after her death, were monuments to her memory. Perishable monuments, you may think. Think of an inscription to commemorate a great life sewed with thread in gar-

ments for the poor !—written, not in brass or stone, but on the smooth sea-sand, ready to be blotted out by to-morrow's tide ! Nay, but this woman's eulogy has, in point of fact, been more securely preserved and more widely published than the victories of Rome or the art of Greece. All generations read her praises, and call her blessed. She has been greatly honoured. In one point she has been made like the Lord, she has left us an example that we should follow her steps. Many are treading in her track to-day ; and the world is greener for us because of the footsteps that she left imprinted on its sand.

Some monuments, such as that of Sir Walter Scott at Edinburgh, when they have obtained a high place in the judgment of educated men, are reduplicated in pictures, and spread in many specimens throughout the civilised world. The one original monument raised to Dorcas in the sacred record has in like manner been many times copied. Societies which are constituted for continuing her work frequently adopt her name : and thus she lives to-day in the world. Being dead, she yet speaketh through the manifold energies of Christian women in all the Christianized countries of the world.

This kind of charity was new in the world when Dorcas began at Lydda to make with her own hands garments for the poor of the neighbourhood. The seed of that kind came from a far country, even an heavenly. It was dropped from the lips of Jesus on the furrows of some tender hearts, and it has propagated itself from generation to generation. The Lord will doubtless find some fields of it growing ripe at His second coming.

Christian love is generic ; it sends out many subordinate species, all partaking of the same essential nature, and each exhibiting particular features peculiar to itself. The species which Peter found flourishing at Lydda is not unfrequent in our own day and land. Where it is genuine it is as beautiful as the violet growing under the hedge ; and, like it, fills the air with fragrance. Female love, working outward through female hands in making garments to clothe the naked, is a well-known and comely form of Christian benevolence. Behold, it is very good. It is Scriptural, useful, safe. It is twice blessed—blessing those that give and those who receive.

The resources at our disposal are much greater than those which belonged to the primitive Christians. There is a greater number of loving hearts, and there is greater power in the operator's hands. Cotton, the spinning-jenny, the power-loom, the sewing-machine—who shall calculate how many times these modern discoveries have multiplied love's power of doing good wherever there is a real living love ? Besides all these, we have more money in our hands, easier means of transit, and greater facilities for combination. The earth produces more, and the powers of nature perform for us all the harder portions of the labour. One Dorcas in our city to-day could do more with her own hands than five in Lydda in the time of Peter.

Yet with all these advantages we have not overtaken the destitution. In some quarters it is increasing on our hands. Widows and orphans are in want within sound of our Sabbath-bells.

The state of the poor around us should put us to shame—should hush our manifold divisions and disputes, and bring us into one that we might be stronger for the Lord's work in the world.

I could point to scenes of horrid cruelty which would make the blood stand still in your veins if you saw them ; and yet they are at our own doors. Children in our cities are starved and killed by slow degrees for want of food and clothing. Why should this be while there are so many really benevolent hearts and so great resources at the disposal of the community ?

There is a deeper thing than the hunger and nakedness of the children. There is a root which bears these bitter fruits. It is the drunkenness of the parents. This is the gulf which we are unable to fill. There it yawns, as represented by public-houses and pawn-shops, between the warm hearts of Christians and the starving children. There it yawns—a bottomless pit. You may throw into it all the wealth of the kingdom; the mighty contribution will sink out of sight in the quagmire, and you will be as far from the naked children as before.

Dorcas sits at home with a burning heart, for she has seen ragged, barefooted children on the street in the winter's cold. She sits and sews. Stitch, stitch, stitch; love makes the needle go until the garment is completed. With light feet she trips down on the morrow to the place where the naked child dwells. She clothes it, and departs. Next day she will visit her charge and see how it fares. The child is naked again; the mother is drunk, and the house is cold. The garment that Dorcas made lies on the shelf of the pawn-shop, and the money in the till of the nearest public-house. Thus the mill goes round—the mill that grinds little children to feed the real giants, more terrible than all the pictured monsters that terrified the nursery.

This process is conducted on a great scale, crushing the little ones into premature graves. If the geologists of a future era should dig into the strata of our cemeteries, they will be amazed to find so large a proportion of the remains to be infant's bones. They will judge it contrary to nature. What can be the cause of the phenomenon? If the history of our time shall then be extant, they will learn from it what their philosophy could not tell them—that the vice of the parents slaughtered the children! Yet the nation looks on helpless!

It is certain, and easily proved, that the poverty which is true and natural, caused by providential circumstances, is small in quantity, and of a kind that is easily cured. We could relieve it and not be burdened by the effort. The exercise would be pleasant and healthful to the community. Instead of being a punishment it might be realized as the fulfilment of a promise, "The poor ye have always with you," that we might never lack an object to draw forth our charity, and so might never miss the larger blessing—the blessing which belongs to those who give. But the pauperism which springs from vice is not only so great that to relieve it becomes a burden—it is of such a kind that to relieve it is impossible.

There is need of two things: *first*, a perennial spring of charity in Christian hearts, finding or forcing a way into every home of misery in the land; and, *second*, an effort by a united people, acting through the legislature and the government, to deal effectively with the material feeders of vice, and so abate the nuisance.

There is some advance in public opinion at the present day; but, alas, great bodies move slowly, especially against the stream. In some of our colonies vigorous experiments have been made. In one of the Australian governments, for example, a law has been enacted under which, when a man or woman has been convicted of being a habitual drunkard, society has a claim for damages against those who supply the drink. Proposals pointing to a restraint of the traffic have been earnestly advocated in our own community, and formally submitted to the legislature. I cannot predict whether this method will be successful, or that; but the attempts are most interesting to all philanthropists, as symptoms that society is awakening to a sense of danger, and beginning to cast about for remedies. It is especially cheering to the heart of Dorcas, as she toils to roll her stone uphill, only to see it rolling down again, to observe that the commonwealth is bestirring itself to put some check on the huge machinery, driven by greed of gain, which resolves night and day, summer and winter, to manufacture a wholesale pauperism.

Meanwhile individual disciples of Christ, whilst they are permitted and even bound in their capacity as citizens to lend their influence to beneficent legislative measures, should not wait on the slow movements of a nation. They should, from love to the Lord and pity for men, put their own hand to the work wherever they can descry an opening. Dorcas enjoyed the blessed privilege of clothing the naked who were within her reach. It was her meat to do her Redeemer's will, and her appetite was abundantly gratified. It is a beautiful feature of the Christian Church at the present day, and a symptom that the Spirit has not forsaken us, that "honourable women not a few" both lay out their means and labour with their hands to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, in loving obedience to the Word of the Lord.

Dorcas Raised to Life

BY REV. CHARLES A. DICKINSON, D.D.

"But Peter put them all forth," &c.—Acts ix. 40, 41.

It is not so much the miracle itself that I desire to discuss briefly as two or three truths which are suggested by it. The raising of the good woman, Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead, was, in its last analysis, like the raising of Lazarus, but the simple exercise of that power which belongs by right to Christ, the Lord of Nature.

Two questions come to my own mind as I study it:—

First. In what condition, or state, was the real Dorcas after she had left the body and before she was summoned back to it? And, second, if that miracle had not been performed, would she to-day be waiting somewhere to be called back to that same body which lay in that upper chamber?

I am well aware that in trying to answer such questions as these there is danger of speaking beyond what is written; and yet there are some things which seem to be very clearly taught in the Scriptures concerning the condition of the soul after death. Christ's accession to His Throne was distinguished, I believe, by the revelation of two transcendent truths—the resurrection of a body, and a resurrection which is simultaneous with death.

First, the resurrection of a body. Not that which lay in that upper chamber. That was the earthly body; the instrument through which the loving, gracious spirit of Dorcas could make itself felt in this material world. The resurrection body had escaped from that, and the miracle consisted in bringing the two together again. It is difficult with our crass and somewhat obtuse senses to understand that there can be a real body which we cannot see and touch; and yet it is doubtless true that there are a multitude of bodies of various proportions and wonderful organism existing quite out of the sphere of our five senses. The study of biology has already opened to us a world of existences which a few years ago were never dreamed of. Could we have eyes with ten times the magnifying power of the strongest microscope we might detect around us forms of life more wonderful than those which were seen through Banquo's wizard glass. Dr. Noah Porter, one of the most eminent investigators in the realm of mind and spirit, declares that the soul, the elementary principle of life, originates the bodily organism in which it passes its earthly life. It has within it the power to renew its body once in seven years for a certain period of time. Should it require another

such body, or medium of activity, when it is through with this one, it may have the power to create it for itself as it formed the one which it first inhabited, or it may already have formed it in the germ, and hold it ready for occupation and use as soon as it casts off the one which connects it with the earth. This statement of Dr. Porter's accords with the teachings of the latest philosophy. Science affirms that the principle of life which we call the soul—the thinking, willing, loving self—is an organic force having a body of its own, which takes from, or rather gives to, this human body its form and features; a body just as real as this framework of flesh and bones, but of a substance so refined that it can only be detected by senses much keener than those we now possess. And this is in perfect keeping with what St. Paul says when he declares that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,” but that there is, nevertheless, a resurrection body. There are celestial bodies, he says; that is, bodies which are fitted for the surroundings and enjoyments of Heaven, just as there are terrestrial bodies which are adapted to their earthly environment, and the one is in the other—the spiritual *body*, not the disembodied spirit, is within the natural body, just as the stalk and blossom of the seed are within the seed. “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body”—the one emerges from the other as the lily bursts from its bulb.

And this leads us to our second truth. This body is raised immediately. If Dorcas had not been called back to the earthly body, she would not have been waiting or sleeping, a disembodied spirit, in anticipation of some far-off resurrection day. When she left the earthly, she took with her the heavenly, body. A disembodied spirit is unthinkable. The long sleep which is supposed by many to intervene between death and the resurrection day is practical annihilation. Resurrection under such circumstances is a virtual new creation of a soul and a personality entirely distinct from those that were in the flesh. I find no warrant whatever for this view in the Scriptures, but I find abundant proof that the resurrection is at the time of death. For example, in the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians St. Paul says: “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”

In this passage the Apostle evidently has in mind two classes of people: those who were already dead at the time of his writing, and those who were alive, including himself. The “we” refers to himself and the Corinthians whom he was addressing. Now what does he assert? He has been talking about the resurrection body, and now he goes on to tell when it is to be assumed. Here I think we have one of the most significant passages in the Bible. It brings out in a clear-cut statement the superlative truth of Christ's new Kingdom. “I show you a mystery,” he says. “I tell you something that has not been known before. First, we shall not all sleep.” Up to the time of the coming of Christ the dead were believed to be in the underworld of Hades or Sheol. They were there in their resurrection bodies waiting for the glorious consummation which was to attend the establishment of the New Dispensation. They were there in waiting, not having yet received the fulfilment of the promises. Their condition, to the Jewish mind, was one of sleep. But Christ's advent had changed all this. Between His death on the Cross and His emergence from the tomb, he had, as Peter declares, descended into Hades to announce there to the spirits in prison the life and immortality which He had brought to light. After this visit and Christ's Ascension there was no more Hades—no longer the sleep of the dead; and so when Martha referred to that far-off resurrection day which they of the Old Dispensation had anticipated, believing that her brother Lazarus was waiting for it

in Hades or Sheol, Christ said to her, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life." Those facts are present facts now. "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead [asleep in Hades], yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die"—in the sense of sleeping the sleep of Hades.

And so St. Paul, with this same transcendent truth in mind says: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Our resurrection is to be instantaneous. We shall at once, with our resurrection bodies, enter into the prepared place which Christ our Risen Lord has in readiness for us.

This truth has in it much of comfort for us all. It has in it a present meaning which is adapted to stimulate and cheer us. The difficulty with many of the doctrines of the after life which have been held by some is their remoteness. These facts and truths relating to the unknown world have been set so far off in the future that they have seemed very unreal to us; but with the consciousness that Christ's spiritual Kingdom has already been established, that we are in it and of it to-day, that Christ is working as Saviour, Judge, and Life-giver, here and now, that death is but a transition from one room of the King's palace to another, that we are to have, and have at once, a resurrection body that shall be just as real and familiar and usable as this through which we are now impressing ourselves upon our friends and the world—all these things carry with them a tremendous spiritual and moral momentum, and when we have once taken them into our faith we get an entirely new understanding of the power of Christ's Resurrection.

Doubtless in some sense the resurrection will be future and far off, but it will not be the resurrection from the dead. As some one has said: "The death of man and his assumption of the spiritual body is not the whole of the resurrection. It stands for the finished humanity and its final presentation to God as the completed work of Christ."

Much of the comfort of this truth comes from the thought that the friends whom we mourn as dead are not wandering in the realms of space as disembodied spirits, or sleeping amid the corruption of the grave, but are realizing what Christ meant when He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions: . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." There, in their resurrection bodies, in the resurrection world which Christ has prepared for them; there, with the great throng of the glorified ones, they are living and moving to-day, waiting for us, and with us waiting for the completed triumph of the new Kingdom. It is impossible with our imperfect faculties to comprehend the conditions of the unseen world into which they are gone. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." What light is to the blind man, or music is to the deaf man, these supernal conditions, and experiences are to us whose spiritual faculties are yet undeveloped; but by and by the mystery will be solved. We shall stand, as Peter stood, on the Mount of Transfiguration with our latent powers developed to the full. The unseen world around us shall reveal its radiant splendours, and we shall see, as Peter saw, not only Christ and Moses and Elias, in their glorified bodies, but fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, children, friends—all who have attained unto that glorious resurrection which the risen Saviour has made possible.

Chapter X.

St Peter's Vision

BY REV. FRANCIS E. CLARK, D.D.

"There was a certain man in Cæsarea, called Cornelius," &c.—Acts x. 1-20.

The traditional house of Simon the tanner, as represented in modern pictures, is a typical Eastern dwelling, with heavy, barred gateways and a forbidding, windowless exterior. The waves of the Mediterranean beat against the low outer wall, while in the courtyard is a spring of pure water which tradition tells us was used by Simon in his occupation. To the flat roof of this house, or one like it, Peter repaired one day, at about the noon hour, to pray, and as he prayed he lost consciousness of the things about him, and a vision strange indeed to Jewish eyes appeared to him. Something like a great sheet seemed to descend from the very heavens, and in the sheet were representatives of the whole animal creation, and to his ear, attentive even in a dream to God's voice, came the message, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." But Peter, not understanding as yet the symbolic meaning of the vision, began to remonstrate and to say: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Then came the words which marked a new era in relation of man to man; then came the revelation of the great truth which our Lord's death had made possible: the truth of the brotherhood of man, which supplemented the great doctrine already revealed of the Fatherhood of God, the catholicity of the Gospel; the abundant cleansing power of the blood of Christ—all this was involved in the vision of the sheet let down from Heaven.

I. GOD'S TIME FOR REVEALING THIS TRUTH HAD COME.

We do not mean that there had hitherto been absolutely no communication of the truth of the brotherhood of all men. That would indeed be an overstatement. In the Old Testament are many foreshadowings of this truth, and our Lord's life was, in one aspect, one long revelation of it; but it had not been received or understood. The Jew was still a Jew, intensely bigoted, uncompromising, exclusive. Even the disciples had not begun to grasp the truth that God was the Father, and they the brothers, of *all men*. But now the time had come to fully make known the great doctrine that Christ died for all mankind and that all were equally precious in God's sight.

The time was auspicious, as God's time always is. "When the tale of bricks is doubled, then comes Moses." When a Paul or a Peter, a Luther or a Lincoln, is needed, he is always ready. God's revelations are never hastened and never retarded. They always come at the moment which men call "the nick of time." A hundred years, or even ten years, before Peter paid that memorable visit to Simon the tanner, the vision could not have been understood; it would have been utterly meaningless to a Jew, even one as devout as Peter; but now Christ's life and death, Christ's miracles and parables, had in advance interpreted the vision and given Peter the key with which he could unlock its mysteries. Moreover this vision occurred in all probability just subsequent to Paul's conversion, perhaps within a few days of that event. The command to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles came to the great Apostle to the Gentiles at the same time that the truth that the Gospel was for the Gentiles came to the great Apostle to the Jews.

Thus always do God's purposes match and link together. In the fulness of time the revelation is made. When the harvest is ripe, the labourers are sent. When the world is ready, the messenger is commissioned. When the ages are prepared for it, the truth is revealed. There is no more convincing incidental proof of the Divine Rulership of the universe than the timeliness of God's progressive revelation. Never fast, never slow, but always at the right moment strikes the clock of Providence.

II. THIS PASSAGE ALSO TEACHES US IN A MOST VIVID WAY GOD'S METHOD OF REVEALING A GREAT TRUTH.

He does not proclaim it from the Heavens, but whispers it to one man, or, as in the case of Peter, impresses it upon his mind in a day vision; and that man passes the revelation to another, and that one to another, and so on until the world has received the message which God had sent. But it is not every one to whom God can reveal Himself, or whom He can make a messenger to carry a new truth to the world. Of all those living in the first century perhaps none were so fitted to receive the new revelation as these two men with whom our passage deals. In this connection it is worth while to dwell for a moment on their characters that we may see what sort of men God can use. In the first place the message of the brotherhood of man came to Peter, whose soul had been tried and purified by passing through the furnace of terrible temptation; but now he was no longer Simon, son of Jona, but Peter the rock man. In this very passage, too, we see that he was a man who could put prejudice aside, though reared in the strictness of Jewish caste and fed upon Jewish traditions from his earliest days. In the vision of the sheet let down from Heaven God revealed a larger truth than Peter had before known, and yet he seems to have accepted it with very little cavil. He was a man of open mind and of a teachable spirit. He was a man with whom God's word weighed far more than traditional prejudices. Moreover we learn from this lesson that he was an obedient man. In the last verse of the passage the commandment is given, "Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." And in the very next verse we read: "Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius." God always seems to test His servants by giving them something to do. He tested Paul by telling him to go into Damascus. He tested the blind man by telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He tested the impotent beggar by telling him to rise and walk. He tested Peter by telling him to go with these strangers who were calling for him, and Peter stood the test.

But the revelation must not only be made to Peter: in order that it might prove effective it must be given by Peter to the world. Cornelius was a representative of the whole world waiting to receive the new revelation. It was quite as important to find some one to receive as it was to find some one who could give the message, and Cornelius was the one chosen. By studying his life we can learn why he was chosen. Though a captain of a Roman cohort, and surrounded by the most unfavourable circumstances and innumerable temptations, we learn that he was a just, devout, and prayerful man. He feared God with all his heart. He was generous as well as devout, for he not only prayed to God, but gave much alms to the people. He too was an obedient man. When told to send to Joppa for one Simon, whose surname was Peter, he questioned God's word not a moment, but sent at once according to God's commandment. He was fearless, too, and outspoken in his devotion to God. Though a Roman officer, he did not acknowledge Rome's deities. As soon as he received the message from on high, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier and declared all the things he

had seen in the vision before he sent them to Joppa. In these few verses we have his character revealed: honest, generous, devout, obedient, fearless; such was the man to whom God confided the revelation which was to revolutionize the world. It is also well worth noting that both these men were engaged in prayer when the vision came. They were kneeling at the mercy seat. To such hearts the Spirit easily finds its way.

This is always God's way of accomplishing His purpose. He chooses means, and these means are intelligent human beings—men who are fitted to carry a new truth to the world. Such men have the glad privilege of being God's messengers. Only such men can God choose. Narrow, bigoted, disobedient, irreverent, impure, or cowardly men cannot be used by God for any such purposes. Through such men He never blesses the world.

III. NOTE HOW THESE MEN WERE PREPARED BY GOD FOR THE MESSAGE THEY WERE TO RECEIVE AND THEN GIVE TO THE WORLD.

Cornelius was prepared for the visit of Peter by the vision at the ninth hour of the day, and Peter, even while the men whom Cornelius had sent were rapidly approaching the tanner's house, was being prepared to receive them by the vision of the sheet full of all manner of beasts. Everything was timed to a moment, as it seems. The vision prepared the way for the messengers, and the messengers interpreted the vision. What a marvellous insight does this give of the way in which God's purposes are intertwined one with another!

He is preparing the mind of one man to receive a message, and at the same time He is preparing another man to give the message. How suggestive is this to many a Christian! Have you not in some hour of communion with God had a message given you that you felt ought to be carried to some one else? Then learn that God has been preparing some one to receive the message, and that if you keep open-hearted to the promptings of the Spirit you will surely find the one for whose sake it was given to you. Every prompting to do good, every generous desire to help some one else, every word that God puts into your heart for another, will find some one ready to receive it, prepared by God for its reception as you were prepared by Him to deliver it.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE DIVINE REVELATION.

The revelation was not given simply for the sake of broadening Peter's soul, or that he might receive Cornelius alone into the circle of his acquaintances; nor was it vouchsafed for the sake of the Roman captain alone, but it related to every man in all the wide world. The vision was for us of this twentieth century as well as for the men of the first century. The message was for America as well as for Syria. The revelation was given in the first place from the roof of a despised tanner, whose occupation made him a reproach and a byword among the aristocratic Jews; but from that house top went the telephonic wires of spiritual communication which reached to all ages and to all parts of the world.

Let us not think, however, that the revelation of God's truth ceased with Peter and Cornelius. God is still revealing Himself to the world through honest, obedient, devout, and fearless men. Any such man may reveal something more of God's truth to all the world. It may not be a revolutionary revelation like that which Peter received and communicated, but it may be just as real a revelation. Every one who puts himself in the right attitude, and whose heart is right with God; who is humble, pure, obedient, fearless, prayerful, has something that God has revealed to him which he can communicate to the world—something which will make the world better and nobler, something that will enlarge the brotherhood of man. Are we living so that God can speak through us to the world? Are our hearts so sensitive to the Divine influences that we can receive the message

which God would speak to us? Are we so obedient and fearless that we can give God's message to those to whom He sends it? Have we so used the truth which God has intrusted to us that He will reveal to us more truth and intrust us with larger grace?

Cornelius

BY REV. J. OSWALD DYKES, D.D.

"There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius," &c. — Acts x. 1-48.

I. Cæsarea and Joppa, lying some thirty miles apart, were at that time the two seaport towns of Palestine. The one was the ancient Jewish harbour, the other the new and more splendid Roman port. Joppa is as old at least as the conquest of the land by Joshua, and reappears at intervals in Hebrew history as the great gate to all comers by the sea. Through it arrived the pine and cedar from Lebanon, with which Solomon fitted up the first, and Ezra the second temple. From it Jonah sailed in his flight to the west. It was the single landing-place, and a very bad one, on the whole of that harbourless shore which bounded Israel on the westward, and which served, by the fact of its being harbourless, to cut Israel off from maritime enterprise, as well as from contact with maritime nations. When the Jews began, shortly before our Lord's birth, to have more close and friendly relations with western peoples, the want was felt of a new coast city, with greater western luxury about it and a safer port. This want the magnificent energy and profusion of Herod the Great supplied. He created an artificial harbour of refuge, guarded from the south and west by enormous breakwaters; and he built a city of palaces, furnished with every convenience for the luxurious life of the Greco-Roman world. Greeks and Jews contended whether the new city, at once seaport and metropolis, should be considered more Jewish or more Greek. In fact, however, it was essentially Roman. Its very object was to mark the tie of amity between its founder and the Roman state. Its name of Cæsarea Sebaste was a compliment to the first Roman emperor. The building which, amid a crowd of theatres, baths, and temples, rose highest, and the white stone of which gleamed farthest across the Mediterranean, was a shrine to the honour of Rome and of its emperor. Cæsarea seemed a ready-made Roman capital; and when, after Herod's death, Palestine was annexed to the Roman province of Syria, his great coast city received the court of the Roman procurator, and its barracks sheltered the Roman troops.

Here then was quartered the regiment, or cohort, in which Cornelius was a subordinate officer. It may have been a company of the Pretorian Guards, or it may have been a corps of Italian volunteers: at all events this officer, who bore the name of one of the most noble Roman clans, must have been a Roman by blood and birth.

The New Testament literature abundantly proves how extensively Jewish influence had paved the way among Gentile nations for the coming of Christianity. This was one task assigned to the peculiar people of Jehovah, which had not been left undone. Of course, orthodox Jews believed that for a heathen God could entertain no favour, until the heathen became by circumcision an adopted member of the select family of Abraham. Therefore they compassed sea and land (as Jesus said) to make one proselyte. In spite of the sternness, rigour, and, in some aspects, repulsiveness of the Mosaic code as read by later Pharisaism, they succeeded. Some men, and far more women, all over the pagan world fully

embraced Judaism. But the influence of the Jewish faith was much wider than this. Many earnest and thoughtful men, disgusted with traditional polytheism and its worn-out myths, yet finding no peace to their souls, either in the fashionable scepticism of the time or in its abominable license, turned with curious interest to that solitary antique faith which still stood erect, self-confident even to arrogance, and pure even to severity, in an age which had dissolved or corrupted every other religion. The worship of Jehovah was to be found in the cities of every civilised land. No intelligent and travelled man could have escaped some knowledge of it. Its synagogues stood open. Its sacred books circulated in Greek. Its emissaries and devotees went everywhere. Though it founded no formal missions, it proselytised with ardour : while its unlikeness to every other religion, its self-containedness and spirituality, its proud exclusiveness, its glorious hopes, were of themselves enough to attract the eyes of many. A gentleman from the west, possessed of some culture, and stationed for years in a Jewish city, had the best possible opportunity for studying the religion and the literature of the Jews. If such a man happened at the same time to be serious in his search for light and frank in his acceptance of it, he was likely to draw very close indeed to the foreign faith which he found around him. Cornelius, like another centurion in the Gospel, is an example of the best type of such men. He had not only gone the length of discarding his ancestral idols and the ceremonies of the State religion ; he even worshipped God after the fashion usual among the Hebrews. We find him fasting all day till three o'clock, observing the stated hours for daily prayer, and liberal in giving alms to the Jews of Casarea ; alms, prayers, and fasts being the three cardinal points of popular Hebrew piety. Nor can there be any question as to the sincerity of this soldier's faith in God, and devout spiritual life ; for he evinced it by his upright and humble behaviour. His domestics and his orderly describe him as a "just man," of "good report among the Jews." The terms on which he stood with the slaves of his household show him to have been a considerate and gentle master. Nor is this all. It seems indubitable that he was at the very time in deep spiritual anxiety, craving clearer light from God. He knew of the coming and preaching and wonders of the holy Man of Galilee. He could not fail to have heard of a new sect that everywhere declared this Man to be the promised Saviour. The neighbouring country was at the moment ringing with Peter's name. In his own town there dwelt a deacon and evangelist of the Church. But these new revelations from the Jehovah of Israel, Who had (it was said) visited His people at last to raise up for them an horn of salvation, were revelations of mercy for the elected and covenanted nation, the circumcised sons of Abraham. For himself, a Gentile foreigner, was there any word of hope and peace from the one great God of Heaven ? Will God hear his prayers, or accept his offerings ? Or must he, after all, if he would have life, forsake his nationality, his profession and his friends, to enter by the straight door of circumcision into that narrow alien fold of Judaism ?

There can be little doubt that over this question the honest heart of the centurion was struggling when he resolved to devote the whole morning of one quiet day to fasting and prayer in his own chamber. For when, at the hour of vespers, there came in to him a visitor in shining apparel, who roused him from his prostrate posture with the word "Cornelius," the first answer he received to his startled and reverential question—"What is it, Lord ?" was this, "Thy prayer is heard." What that prayer was, which the blameless and charitable life of the Roman caused God to remember, we gather from God's answer to it ; and the answer is this : "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, who shall tell thee words whereby thou shalt be saved."

Scattered all round the wide shores of the Mediterranean and beyond it there were at that day multitudes of souls whom Jesus called His "other sheep," who were not of the Jewish fold, whom also He desired to gather. Very various as must have been their degrees of preparation for the Gospel, of present faith and light, or of readiness to hear His voice, yet the Shepherd's eye rested upon them all. Their prayers were heard. The day, long sighed for by sages and godly souls through that night in which God "winked at" the ignorance of men, the day of hope for all nations, was dawning. The light which had already risen on Israel was moving westward to rise upon the Gentiles, and become the light of the world. Nor could any better representative of western heathendom be found than this Roman soldier—type of Rome's all conquering world-might and latest product of a long-growing civilisation, which was soon to give place to another. He was ready. To him, first of heathens, God, by plain voice and vision of a celestial messenger, spoke words of acceptance; and the heart of Cornelius—a prompt and honest and obedient heart—was open to the word of the great Captain. "Immediately, therefore, he sent for Peter."

II. Peter, on the other hand, a day's journey off, in Joppa, was not ready. The Gentiles of that age were prompter to enter the Church than was the Church to open its doors. To Peter, of course, as to every other Jew, it was quite a familiar idea that the Gentiles should come one day to worship God and believe in His Messiah; but it had never yet occurred to him, or to almost any other Jew, that this could happen unless by the Gentiles first becoming Jews. By training Peter was a Jew of the intensely national school. In spite of their faith in Christ, he and the bulk of Palestine believers had remained, up to this point, Jews still. To such men the division which God had set up betwixt the two portions of mankind did not seem at that time a temporary party-wall, intended to be taken down after it had served its purpose, in order that wider room might be made for both in one new temple. It was a fence of permanent and hopeless exclusion for all beyond, of permanent inclusion for all within. God had, as they believed, limited His grace for ever to the covenant of circumcision. All men who had not been brought near by that covenant and consecrated by its rites were unclean and profane. It followed that the Church, or assembly of such as believed in Jesus Christ, could not be a wider communion than the followers of Moses, but a narrower. It formed a lesser fold inside the fold of Judaism. It was a more retired and safe shrine, to which you could only pass through the fore-court of the law. Any man might, it was felt, get into the fellowship of Jesus, and all men, it was hoped, would some day do so; still, to the great world of uncircumcised heathen sinners, access could lie only through that preliminary apparatus of cleansing which God had prepared in the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic ritual.

To rectify this mistake was the design of Peter's vision on the housetop. It was the day after Cornelius sent off his messengers: two household slaves and one orderly, all of them men who sympathised with their master's religious convictions, and knew the purport of their mission. These three Italians, having walked a portion of the distance after three o'clock on the evening before, were now, at noon of the next day, coming pretty near to Joppa. They had not loitered, for it is a ride of eleven hours to the modern traveller, and they were on foot. Noon was an hour of prayer; and Peter had chosen for his oratory the flat housetop, which, at the hottest time of day, would be as quiet and still a spot as could be had. It was a spot, too, most apt to awaken thoughts of God's great line of demarcation betwixt chosen Jew and uncovenanted heathen. Before him, as he knelt, lay the land of Abraham and of the promise. From his rock to

which the town's white houses clung silent in the heat, he could look over green groves of orange-trees at its foot, to the broad well-cropped plain across which he had journeyed, till his eyes rested on the fainter line of Benjamin's hills. There, behind the hills, unseen save by fancy, stood the holy city, to whose familiar temple he still with the pious usage of his people turned his face to pray. On the right hand and the left stretched to south and north the yellow streak of blown sand, which, then as now, must have marked the line of coast. He was on the furthest verge of sacred soil. Behind him was nothing but the sea; not the sheltered tiny lake of his fishing days, but the Great Sea, mysterious, cruel in its brightness, oppressive for its vastness, beyond whose far horizon lay the strange foreign world of the uncircumcised—the unknown and dreadful lands from which came the infidel and the conqueror. If, in such a place, any natural thoughts awoke in Peter touching the limits of his nation's fold and the lost sheep who were not of the House of Israel, they were interrupted by a very commonplace and prosaic craving. It is improbable that noon was a usual meal-hour, so that Peter's hunger probably had some special occasion. Yet to this slight and casual circumstance the whole revelation attached itself. He was hungry, and while the household of his namesake the tanner prepared food below, he on the roof, fresh from prayer and meditation, was overtaken in an ecstasy. He was awake, like Cornelius the day before, and, like Cornelius, he was fasting; but, unlike Cornelius, who retained his senses unoppressed, Peter was absorbed out of consciousness of external facts through the unusual power of spiritual impressions. Being lifted above his ordinary thinking, he lay open to whatever super-sensuous communications might anyhow reach his spirit. The divine teaching came in the form of a vision. The sky above appeared to divide, that down from its secret glowing depths of blue might come a thing, which wore the look of a vast linen cloth, gathered up at its four corners into four ends, by which it was, as it were, suspended from the sky. Slowly this thing came down, till, as it neared the Apostle, he could see over its rim, and in it was the appearance, which grew plainer as he gazed, of innumerable living things of every kind that walks, or creeps, or flies, as if all animals known to Peter in his Syrian home had somehow been collected in one vast crowd. Clean and unclean creatures, it struck him, were mixed promiscuously together. While he gazed a voice seemed to say beside him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat": and to the unseen, unknown Speaker, Peter made characteristic, energetic, and very Jewish answer—"By no means, Lord, for common or unclean things never entered into my mouth." The words which replied upon these of Peter—the second utterance of the mysterious Voice—formed the key words of the whole vision, and are precisely identical in both the reports which we possess:—"What God did cleanse, make thou not common." It remains uncertain whether only these pregnant words were repeated three times, or (which seems less likely) the whole conversation; but after the third repetition, suddenly the gathered sheet with all its varied life seemed to be drawn quickly back into the sky by some invisible Hand.

Taken by itself, this vision might hardly have been quite intelligible to Peter. It might on reflection have indicated no more to him than some approaching change in the laws which regulated food. But the providence of God soon helped him to a clue. He was still meditating on the meaning of what he had seen, when he heard the three strangers approach the outer gate of the entrance court, and call to know if one Peter were lodging there. Hurrying down the outside stair, which led from the roof to the court without passing through the house, Peter himself met and admitted the men. In the light of their message and the dealings of God with their master, Peter felt instinctively that he was meant to

read the true lesson of his ecstasy. So read, it was not hard to interpret it aright. He saw that in the abolition of that symbolical distinction betwixt clean animals and unclean, betwixt what might and might not be eaten, there was also enclosed the abolition of all such unreal distinctions as had hitherto divided before the face of God the Gentile from the Hebrew.

In this vision, interpreted to Peter by the Holy Ghost, Gentile Christians may read the charter of their Gospel freedom. We owe it to the revelation of that noontide at Joppa that we are Christians and yet not Jews ; bound no longer by the ceremonial which pressed upon ancient saints like a yoke ; encircled no longer by artificial distinctions of clean and unclean ; but Christ's freemen in a world where to the pure heart all things are pure, and all men are equal before God. Step by step, through symbol and through providence, by the opening of men's minds and by visits of Angels, by force of facts and His own direct down-pouring of the Holy Ghost, He Who reigns and loves us all for whom He died, did force upon the reluctant Church of these first days the conviction that the road to Christ does not lie by Moses alone, no, nor by Abraham ; but that Christ's kingly City of Refuge and Peace " lieth four-square," with gates wide and high, always open, to face each quarter of the globe ; so that the penitent pilgrim, whether he follow in that Italian soldier's steps, or draw near from any farther-off shore or province of great dark heathendom, may have no roundabout journey, past Sinai and Moriah, to reach the portal ; but may approach by a straight path, and enter right in, to find sweet welcome from the King.

III. The event, for which the preceding steps had been a preparation, took place on the third day after the vision of Cornelius, on the second after that of Peter. The scene shifts back to the officer's quarters in the barracks at Cæsarea. The good centurion had calculated quite correctly the length of time likely to be consumed by the journey of his messengers and their return. He allowed one night for rest at Joppa, as well as for Peter to make his arrangements to accompany them ; and because the distance exceeded an average day's march, he supposed the party to have spent another night on the road. This delay was made all the more requisite by a circumstance which Cornelius could not anticipate. Conscious that the divine summons to Cæsarea and his vision on the housetop must be precursors of some very momentous transaction, by which the future relations of Jew and Gentile within the Church were to be affected, Peter adopted the precaution of taking witnesses along with him. No fewer than six of the believing Jews of Joppa were selected to be his companions, in order that their evidence might afterwards confirm to the whole Jewish Church whatever indications of His will the Lord should vouchsafe. The party, thus increased to the number of ten, did not actually reach Cæsarea till towards three o'clock, in the afternoon of the second day. By that time Cornelius was fully expecting them.

The centurion met the Apostle at the outer gate of his quarters. That he prostrated himself at the feet of his visitor, could not mean in a Roman, what it might have meant in an Oriental, a simple obeisance of courtesy. It was really in some sort an act of religious reverence, and for this heathen, nothing could be more natural. To heathen habits of feeling, the worship which belonged to the immortal gods, belonged also in an inferior degree to a crowd of subordinate but semi-divine beings, deified men, or local and tutelar divinities. It spread itself abroad, in a still laxer form, over everything which was at all connected with the State religion, its idols, its temples, or its priests ; and at Rome itself, religious rites had just begun a few years before to be paid to the Head of the State as the quasi-divine representative upon earth of celestial rule. The strict barriers, therefore, which among Jews confined religious adoration in every form and

degree to the one true God alone, were utterly foreign to pagan habits of thought. This man only obeyed an instinct which every Gentile would have owned, when he prostrated himself before one whom he had been told by a heavenly messenger to regard as a special agent and oracle of the Supreme God. The decision with which Peter at once repelled such exaggerated reverence marks the strong contrast between Hebrew and heathen feeling. To the Jew there stretched an infinite and bridgeless gulf betwixt Him Who is alone God, adorable for ever, and all other beings who, as dependent creatures, are like nothing before Him, and vanity. This gulf paganism had striven to fill up with whole species of imaginary personages, somewhat less than the supreme deity, but a good deal more divine than man; in consequence of which the sentiment of adoration was broken down, and the stern awful sense of divine sanctity or separateness was enfeebled, till worship became a graduated system of more or less respectful observances. It is needless to add how much nobler as well as more true was the Hebrew than the pagan view. Such a horror of idolatry as feared to divert from the one Jehovah to any created being the least particle of that religious reverence which the Jealous One had challenged for His own, was one of the most important lessons taught to the world through the House of Israel.

This state of superstitious awe in which the Roman approached St. Peter was most unfavourable to the frank or intelligent reception of a message so simple and human in its form as the Gospel. But the friendly conversation in which it was remarked that Peter engaged his host as he accompanied him to the guest room, with the outspoken and manly explanation which he there gave to the assembled guests, put Cornelius entirely at his ease, and brought him back to his habitual attitude of quiet thoughtful inquiry. This stranger, though heralded by a celestial apparition and bearing words from God, was yet—not only a “man”—but quite a plain and ordinary Jew, with a provincial accent, and attended by companions whose social standing was equally humble. His look wore nothing celestial to overbear the imagination of the soldier. He was not even above the prevailing social prejudices of his countrymen; for his first words, uttered with the abruptness which belonged to his impulsive character, were an apology for having ventured to disregard the usages of his nation. No law of God forbade to the Jew all intercourse whatever with Gentiles, only it had grown by this time to be the rule in circumspect Jewish society, as we learn from Latin writers, and the later regulations of the Talmud fixed it as a sacred duty. These Gentiles, quartered in a Jewish town, knew very well what the practice of devout Hebrews was; and Peter was frank enough to admit that for his own part nothing but a special revelation from Heaven could have induced him to depart from it. By the vision at Joppa, by inward spiritual direction, and by the force of events, God had now made it clear to His servant that no man was henceforth to be treated as profane or unclean. The distinction among mankind, on which Hebrew usage rested, was at last so far abolished that the Gentiles had been by the blood of Christ made clean enough for Jewish touch; even as the ancient distinction of meats, which before kept them apart, had been abolished, so that Peter could sit now at Cornelius's table with an untarnished conscience. It was for this reason, as he explained, that he had come when sent for, without one word of objection or of scruple, and he begged to know why they had sent for him.

The composed account which Cornelius thereupon gave of his vision four days before, and the polite terms of welcome in which he expressed the readiness of himself and his friends to hear God's message, reflect the simple, transparent character of the man. In tone they form a contrast to the energetic, almost vehement, rapidity of Peter in the discourse which followed. The moment was

come for the Apostle to deliver the message with which his Divine Master had charged him, and the soul of the man kindled with his blessed burden. He brought glad tidings to these longing souls ; and the first words in which he is reported to have opened his testimony are so impetuous, so defiant of construction, that they have been the despair of grammarians. Yet before he even begins to preach the Gospel, he gives most emphatic expression to the great lesson which this whole series of events had been teaching to himself. Before him sat an audience such as he had never previously preached Christ to. The narrative of Cornelius and the waiting faces of his friends have crowned that sequence of proofs by which God had been conducting him, whether he would or not, to a conclusion grand enough to thrill him with agitation. That God respected no man's person, was a doctrine he had read indeed often enough in Holy Scripture, and, in the letter of it, knew by heart. But never till now had he realised its import or dreamed how wide its application was. Never had he seen that this impartiality of God, which passes by external differences to deal only with what is moral and spiritual in men, places all just and pious souls of whatever nationality on the same platform before God's grace, and makes them equally fit on that ground alone to receive the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Peter had heard his Master say, that the one condition of any man's coming unto Him was a certain secret inward drawing of the soul by the Father in Heaven ; and that whosoever came, being thus taught and drawn of God, He should in no wise cast out. He had also heard Jesus declare in the temple that the moral and religious preparation required for the reception of His Gospel lay in that tractableness of will which desires with a child's docility to do God's will. Still Peter had never before realised that such words possessed spiritual width enough to take in uncircumcised, as well as circumcised, men : so that every one throughout God's world who was of the truth should hear Christ's voice. Now he saw it. Here were men, pure Gentiles, who yet, through God's mysterious grace, feared God and wrought righteousness ; in whom the moral and spiritual conditions of acceptance into the kingdom were complete, although the external physical conditions he had supposed needful were wholly wanting. These men God Himself had so far recognised as fit candidates for mercy, that to them as they were God had sent him to declare the glad tidings of peace.

So much of his intended sermon as Peter had delivered when he was gloriously interrupted, falls into three parts. The first is an historical retrospect of facts which, having happened within a few years before and in their immediate neighbourhood, were already known to his audience. The second is the testimony of an eye-witness to one stupendous fact, not yet certainly known to the hearers, which filled up with light and meaning all the preceding history. The third is an authoritative proclamation on behalf of God of the way to pardon at His judgment-seat through His exalted Son, Jesus Christ. The whole speech thus moves through the same cycle of ideas as are found in all other speeches of St. Peter. It wears the same threefold character of an historical review, an apostolic witness, and an evangelist's proclamation of peace.

In the first place, Peter rapidly recalled certain notorious facts connected with the ministry of the Nazareth Teacher, that ministry which began in the adjacent province of Galilee after John's baptism, and was terminated by Jesus' own violent death at Jerusalem. People who lived in Cæsarea could not help knowing that rumour which a few years before had gone abroad and convulsed society in Palestine ; how, after receiving, as was said, at His baptism in Jordan the unction of the Holy Ghost which marked Him out for the Christ, Jesus had traversed the whole land as a teacher and a wonder-worker ; how, as a minister of God specially

to the circumcision (though He was at the same time "Lord of all men," Jew and Gentile alike ; as Peter parenthetically interjects), He had preached to the children of Israel God's Gospel of peace through Himself as their Messiah ; how He proved that He was not alone in this nor "spoke of Himself," but had "God with Him," by beneficent works of healing, wrought everywhere on such of His unhappy countrymen as evil spirits had afflicted with sore troubles, especially those over whom Satan had, as it were, tyrannised, mastering even their wills ; finally how a Man Who thus carried about with Him, in some pregnant, though as yet indefinite, sense, the special presence of God, had been violently put to death by crucifixion.

So much they already knew by common rumour. What they could not yet know was that the Crucified had since come to life again. The evidence of this (Peter said) had not been given publicly to the nation which had rejected Him. It was kept for chosen witnesses previously selected of God for that end when Jesus called them to Apostleship. Yet, since this fact was one which made all the rest weighty and transformed the biography of the Nazarene into a Gospel for mankind, therefore to these chosen witnesses the evidence had been made absolutely complete. They not only saw Him ; they ate with Him ; they drank with Him. Proof the most searching and indubitable had been afforded them in order that their words might certify the world. "And we," said Peter, in name of his absent colleagues, "we are they who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead."

Thus far the preacher sketched in outline the historical basis on which the Gospel reposes. To us, both these classes of facts, those which were patent to Jesus' contemporaries, and those of which the Twelve were witnesses at first hand, are become matters of remote history, borne down to us on the credible authority of certain written documents. We cannot, as Cornelius could, cross-examine a man who had eaten with the risen Christ ; nor can we, as he, by a week's tour among the highlands of Galilee might have done, investigate what it was this Man taught, and what were the works He was said to do. Under this disadvantage must lie every generation except that first one. Yet the first-hand evidence has been preserved to us with such freshness and abundance in those collected pamphlets which we call the New Testament, as substantially to defy criticism and to satisfy with quite reasonable certainty a candid historian. More than this we have no right to ask. Less than this we could not trust to ; for it is on this substructure of plain fact that we must place, just as Peter did, the stupendous doctrines of Christ's Gospel. These doctrines, as recited by that primitive preacher, are mainly two : the one that God has made Jesus of Nazareth to be the Judge at last of all men, living or dead, Jew or Gentile ; the other, that the road to pardon and justification at the bar of this Judge lies through faith in Himself. The elevation of a Person Who appeared at a given period in human history to the throne of divine justice, so that in His hands, through which men drove nails, shall yet lie the everlasting doom of every living soul, is not so much a doctrine as a revealed fact. It is one of those facts, however, which wraps within its bosom a world of teaching. The divine dignity of the Man thus entrusted with the supreme task of Deity, the innocence and sacrificial worth of His passion, with the vital moment of each other man's relation to this single Man ; these are all implications involved in that fact and carried along with it. Further, it is because Jesus is to judge that He can now save. Absolution from sin, like condemnation for it, lies in His hand. It comes through His name. It comes to the men who trust Him for it. It lies open and free to trusting souls of any land or race. Finally, it is in this Saviour Judge and His pardon of sin that we must

find the focus, the burning centre, of the earlier Old Testament revelation, preparing for or foretelling grace to men — the centre, in fact, of all earlier training or drawing of human hearts to wait in darkness for a light to arise : “ To Him give all the prophets witness.”

To this point only Peter had arrived, purposing to amplify and urge his message ; but for prepared hearts few words are needful. Men who are waiting for God leap before the preacher. The inspiration of the Holy Ghost makes speech superfluous. The advent on these heathens in its highest form of that peculiar spiritual influence which is characteristic of the Christian Church ; I mean of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit not only of new birth, but also of the assurance of sonship to God, is an event which has no parallel save Pentecost. This was the Pentecost of the Gentiles. Suddenly, just as at Jerusalem, on the whole assembly of worshippers, with some visible, unmistakable signs, if not with rush of wind or tongue of flame, there fell the Holy Ghost. Again, too, as at Jerusalem, the tongues of the heathen men were filled with strange and unknown words of exultation, and aloud, in the heat of a holy rapture, each one broke into the praises of the God of salvation. It was not possible for Peter and the Church then, it is not possible for us now, to mistake the Divine purpose in this repetition at Cæsarea of what had occurred in Jerusalem. God would put the alien and so long “ unclean ” nations on a platform no less high than that of the Jewish mother Church. He would authenticate by as solemn a baptism from Heaven their admission into the Household and Kingdom of His Son. “ What God hath cleansed,” said the voice in the vision, “ that call not thou common.” The marvel of Cæsarea repeated the warning. God did cleanse heathendom in the person of Cornelius and his fellows, and Peter dared no longer call heathen men common. It was this perfect parallel between God’s gift of His Spirit to these Romans and the gift of His Spirit “ at the beginning,” which Peter employed, both at the time and afterwards, as a conclusive proof that God meant, under the new Gospel economy, to treat the circumcised and the uncircumcised alike. Those words in which the Lord Jesus, on the eve of His Ascension, had promised to the first little company of friends who clung regretfully about Him, that He would soon baptise them with that Spirit-baptism of which John’s had been a figure, flashed through Peter’s mind when he saw the memorable scene of the upper chamber renewed in the barrack-room. This, too, was a fulfilment of that promise. This, too, was the true baptismal blessing, the actual reception of men into the Church of Christ. Cornelius and the rest are not circumcised ; but they are indubitably disciples by the best right, and in the fullest communion with the Head, since they have been introduced into fellowship by Christ’s own hand, and sealed with Christ’s own seal. “ Who can forbid the water, where He has not withheld the Spirit ? ”

Never, save on that solitary occasion, did the special gift of the Holy Ghost precede the baptism of a convert. Even on that occasion the exceptional presence of the thing signified did not render superfluous the observance of the sign. God is not bound even to His own order ; nor can baptism possess any magical virtue to confer what God conferred without it. Yet the Church even then followed in the steps of her Lord, ratifying by her outward act what He had already done by inward grace. To administer the Sacraments, indeed, was not in that primitive age the highest office of Christian ministers. Following the same rule as St. Paul observed, Peter left it to the six brethren from Joppa to complete by baptism the formal reception into church-fellowship of these first Gentile converts. Baptised they were, however, with the baptism of water, confessing their sins and invoking the name of the Lord Jesus.

Thus was consummated the first formal or official recognition that the law of Moses and the older rites of Abrahamic Judaism were, as conditions of life and rules of duty, for ever abolished in the Christian Church.

The Vision of Cornelius

BY REV. JOHN FAWCETT, M.A.

"There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius," &c. — Acts x. 1.

Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, and so called to distinguish it from the Syrian bands in the pay of Rome, just as the British troops in India are distinguished from the Native troops in the pay of England. Thus the first uncircumcised Gentile who was baptized into the Christian faith, and enlisted under the banners of the Prince of Peace, was a man of war. And however abhorrent the spirit of war may be from the spirit of the Gospel, we do not learn that he was required to relinquish his profession. Christianity will at length abolish the profession of arms, but it will do so by abolishing war itself. When wars shall cease, there will be no demand for soldiers; and when Christian principles shall more generally influence the human character, then ambition and those narrow politics which cause nation to lift up sword against nation will cease to operate. In this way, perhaps, alone it is that Christianity interferes with the established usages of nations. It is not by proscribing particular institutions or particular callings; but by raising the character of man; by introducing principles so holy and so charitable, that all violence, and wasting, and oppression, must fall before them.

Meanwhile there is nothing in the profession of arms which hinders a good soldier from being a good man. Cornelius was such an one. He was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house. Though not a Jewish proselyte, he had learned to discard the gods many and lords many of his countrymen, and to worship the one living and true God. And what he did himself he taught his household to do—he feared God with all his house—so that at Cæsarea, in the house of a Roman military officer, might be seen the pleasing spectacle of a religious family. This spectacle was as singular as it was pleasing, and no doubt his profession of religion would subject Cornelius to many a reproach. I should not wonder if his piety made a greater demand on his courage than the danger of death which he had to encounter in the field of battle; but he was enabled to maintain his ground; for he was a consistent character, and the grace of God was with him. How short, yet how lovely is the description of his religious course! He "gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always." He did not, on the one hand, make many prayers for a cloak of covetousness; nor, on the other, did he consider acts of kindness toward man as making up for the want of devotion toward God. But he attended to both: and the one seemed to help the other, for in both he was abundant; his alms were many, his prayers constant.

What a character is here! And we might be ready to think that such a course must have been attended with a secret self-satisfaction, with an approving conscience, and a good hope of final recompence. But there is reason to doubt this; and rather to believe that he was sensible of many defects in his duties; and experienced more of doubt and fear than of peace and hope. There is reason to believe that he was dissatisfied, and felt a want; and that he not only prayed regularly, but also that he poured out his soul unto God for a specific blessing.

He knew that he was a sinner—not a day would pass in which he would not find sin working in his members, and defiling his conscience ; and while he felt the burden of this, his prayers and alms would not be able to relieve his oppressed spirit. He wanted remission of sins, and the assurance of salvation brought home to his soul. And for this we may believe that he was pleading, when, after fasting till the ninth hour, he made his requests known unto God by prayer and supplication. The ninth hour of the day, or three o'clock in the afternoon, was with the Jews the hour of prayer—the time of offering the evening sacrifice ; so that Cornelius seems not only to have learned to pray to the God of the Jews, but also to have adopted their seasons of prayer. This is a circumstance of no great moment in itself, yet it serves in some measure to show the humility of his character. He looked up to the Jews as worthy to be his instructors in religion—their God his God, their times of worshipping his times.

Did he then plead his alms ? I trow not. God remembered them ; Cornelius forgot them. He did not come before God as a righteous person, whose prayers and alms might recommend him to the Divine favour, but as one who was very blind and ignorant, and knew not the way of peace, but wished to be guided into it. That such was the tenour of his prayer we may assuredly gather from the nature of the blessing given him in answer to it. That blessing was instruction. There appeared to him an Angel of God, who said, " Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God." The Angel announced to Cornelius the teaching which he was to receive ; but the Angel was not to be his teacher. The Angel did not go on to show him the way of salvation. This was to be done by a man like himself. It has pleased God in the economy of human redemption, to make man the instrument of saving instruction to man ; sinners are to teach the way of salvation to sinners ; and they who stand in conscious need of mercy themselves are appointed to proclaim the tidings of mercy to others. The glorious visitant, therefore, who appeared to Cornelius, directed him to send to Joppa, and to inquire at the house of one Simon a tanner, for Simon surnamed Peter, who should tell him what he ought to do ; and from whom he should hear words whereby he and all his house should be saved. Having given this direction the Angel departed ; and Cornelius having called two of his godly servants, and a devout soldier, and having made them fully acquainted with the circumstance, sent them to Joppa.

When the Angel had given his directions to Cornelius, Cornelius immediately obeyed them. He regarded not the distance nor the trouble, nor the obscurity of Peter, nor the meanness of his abode ; but without any delay sent two of his servants and a devout soldier forthwith to Joppa. The conduct of Cornelius in this respect, and the Lord's method of dealing with him, may teach us both what we may expect, and how we should ask when pleading for forgiveness of sins, and the sense of that forgiveness on our conscience. It may not be the will of God to give at once, in answer to such prayers, the very thing sought for. It may not be His pleasure to afford immediately those views of Gospel grace which shall take away the fear and bondage and doubt of an awakened soul, and fill the heart with joy and peace in believing.

The first answer to such prayers may be the distinct impression of some duty to be performed. The connection between the performance of that duty and the blessing sought may not be perceived by the supplicant. All that he perceives is that it is the will of God that he should do it : yet it is the direct way to the peace which he seeks ; and if laying aside objections and evil reasonings he does the thing required, and goes on committing himself to the Divine guidance, doing the will of God as it opens before him, and honestly endeavouring to know that

will, he shall be led safely, though it be by a way which at first he knows not⁴; darkness shall be made light before him, and crooked things straight, till at length he walks in the clear day, and his feet are established in an even path: for the promise is sure, "ask, and it shall be given you." And "if any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God": for the prayer of faith is never in vain. However dark and ignorant a man may be, and however disadvantageously situated, if he is humble, sincere, and seeking the Lord with all his heart, the Lord will be found of him.

Cornelius was in this condition. He was very dark, conscious of his ignorance and desirous of instruction; but where he could apply he knew not. Perhaps Cesarea could not furnish a single person who was able and disposed to show him the way of salvation. Philip, the Evangelist, had indeed been there about seven years before; and we may conclude that Philip would preach there—with what success we know not—but whatever it was, it would be among Jews. Philip had not learned that he should extend the Gospel to the Gentiles; and if any of the lost sheep of the house of Israel had been converted by his ministry, the same prejudices against the Gentiles would remain with them. Philip, himself, who had baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile by birth, and who had preached with success among the Samaritans who were but half Jews, and whom our Lord Himself had classed with Gentiles when He said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not," might have been thought a fit person to have instructed Cornelius, as there might be in him less remaining prejudice to overcome. But Philip was not the man to be sent for, God having made choice of Peter among the Apostles and brethren, that by his mouth this Gentile should hear the word of the Lord and believe. Peter is to be the instructor of Cornelius; and an Angel is employed to accomplish the object of bringing them together—the Apostle and the centurion—while the higher office of teaching is committed to a man; the humbler office of pointing out the teacher is assigned to an Angel from Heaven.

It was about the ninth hour of the day when this inhabitant of Heaven appeared to Cornelius, and accosted him. When Cornelius looked on him he was afraid and said—"What is it, Lord?" We well know that to a sinful man the appearance of a messenger from Heaven must always appear formidable. But perhaps never could such an appearance be manifested under circumstances more calculated to lessen the fear than in the present instance. In the first place it was not in the night, as when the Angel of the Lord came upon the shepherds to announce the glad tidings of a Saviour's birth, and when the glory of the Lord shone round about them, they were sore afraid. The vision to Cornelius was not thus in the night, a sudden, supernatural light shining in the darkness but in the open day.

Moreover the Angel appeared in the form of a man, which familiar aspect might lessen the terror; and the Angel came also not when Cornelius was doing any wicked thing, or forgetting God, and trifling, but when he had been employing his time in fasting and prayer. One might think that when found so piously engaged in open day, by one appearing as a man, though clad in robes of light, Cornelius might have beheld him with confidence and joy; and his being afraid shows how deeply the consciousness of sin is infixed in the heart of man, so that he cannot be brought into contact with what is heavenly and sinless without a feeling of fear.

We are all, perhaps, sensible of a sentiment of constraint when we are in the presence of persons greatly our superiors. We are often embarrassed on such occasions, and lose our presence of mind. For my own part, I know what this feeling is very well; and yet I do think that if a person could be found, come to

man's estate and maturity of understanding, but entirely free from sin, having never committed any, whose speech was always with grace, seasoned with salt, and having no evil propensities in his heart, I should stand before him with greater awe than if I stood before the king ; and all the kindness of his manner, his gracious words, and the full conviction which I should have of the sincerity of love in his heart, would not take away the awfulness of such a presence ; and though there might be great admiration, and even love of such excellence, yet I should experience constraint, and be scarcely bold enough to speak before one so utterly unlike myself. Perhaps this is the reason why the disciples seem always to have been afraid of their kind and condescending Master. I am sure it is a reason why we should feel a fear of this kind, when we remember that we are always in His presence. He has indeed assumed our form—the Angel of the Covenant is not only in human shape, but in human flesh. He is not only like a man, but He is a Man. But he is a Man Who never knew sin. Though therefore the awfulness of the Godhead is veiled by His humanity, there is an awfulness in His humanity itself because of His sinlessness. It is because He is sinless that He can be our Saviour : and yet that very sinlessness lifts Him so above us, that we feel all unmeet to be in His presence, and can hardly help saying with Peter, “ Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” This is a right feeling : if we experience it seldom, it is because we seldom realize His presence and His holiness. I wish we felt more of this awe, only it should be mixed with confidence in His love and grace. We should fear His goodness, yet not so as to hinder us from fleeing to that goodness for refuge, and committing our souls into His hands. If we do this, though we shall not lose anything of that awe and reverence which His sinlessness should ever inspire, we shall acquire by daily fellowship a humble boldness—I had almost said a holy familiarity. We shall have a fear which will forbid our doing anything which may offend His pure eye, or uttering anything which may grieve His holy ear ; and yet His presence will not oppress us with a painful constraint or tormenting dread.

But when we see an Angel from Heaven giving directions to Cornelius where he should find a poor Apostle of Jesus Christ, ministering to an heir of salvation in so ordinary a matter, shall we think it condescension to enter into the humblest habitation, and to perform any service of love to one of the poorest among our brethren ? There was a greater difference between the Angel and Cornelius than between man and man, however high the one, however low the other. Never, then, let us think any work of mercy beneath us. If we can ourselves instruct the ignorant, let us do so. If we cannot do this, yet if we can point out to them where they may obtain instruction, let us do it. If we hope to be like the Angels in glory hereafter, let us endeavour to be like them in doing the will of God here. The more diligently we do this the more we shall be inclined to increase in doing it, and that for two reasons. We shall enter more fervently into the prayer which we are apt to utter without meaning—“ Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven ” ; and in answer to that prayer we shall receive greater grace, and stand more ready for all our Father's will ; and the more we do that will, the more we shall delight to do it. We shall find that all His commandments are good ; and His service perfect freedom. Even those services which are offensive to our pride, and wearisome to our flesh, will be gladly undertaken if we consider not only what an Angel from Heaven stooped to when he ministered to Cornelius, but what the Son of God stooped to when He became the Son of Man, and ministered to us.

Cornelius

BY REV. JAMES T. P. FARQUHAR, B.D.

"There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius," &c.—Acts x. 1.

The conversion, or rather the enlightenment of Cornelius, and his reception into the Christian Church was an event of no small importance in its early history, not only for the fundamental principles which thereby found a fuller recognition, and have ever since continued to exercise a larger influence upon its life, but also (we may be sure) for the immediate effects it had upon the actions and thoughts of the new Christian's contemporaries. In any case we find that in the narrative of the Acts St. Luke devotes considerable space to it, and, interesting as the story is in itself, we must not imagine that St. Luke had no other purpose in writing the book than to amuse his readers; in fact, it has been well pointed out that he is at pains to select events either in themselves fundamental such as the descent of the Holy Spirit, or else typical of the permanent life of the Church such as the ordination of St. Matthias, and that it is only when he has thus laid the foundation of things, that he goes on to tell in full the story of St. Paul's missionary labours—itsself the great pattern for the Church Militant of all time.

Let us then attend to what we are told of Cornelius; and if in regard to the inner spiritual truths of the Gospel which are the same for all time, a little retelling is helpful to us, much more is it so in the case of an outward event like this. For we must recall as far as we can those circumstances which from very familiarity to himself and his contemporaries the historian omitted to mention, but which we of to-day are in danger of forgetting altogether; and our very attempt to do so will help to make the story live again.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army of occupation in Palestine. This was a position not altogether unlike that of a captain in the British army in India; for just as average British opinion is apt to despise the Hindu; and as the high-caste Hindu in his turn regards the Briton as being unclean and outside the pale of equal intercourse, even while he has to submit to him as physically the stronger, so, though, of course, with some obvious differences, would the Pharisees and the Romans stand with regard to each other. The Roman army, too, did not consist for the more part of Romans or even of Italians, but of recruits of many different nationalities, and though but few Pharisees must have joined, yet of other inhabitants of Palestine, Jews included, many did so without doubt; Cornelius himself, however, belonged to what was known as the Italian Band, and as his name indicates was probably a Roman.

At no time is an army, and least of all the army of a conquering nation, likely to be a good school of gentleness and piety. But Cornelius had seen that salvation was of the Jews, that there was but one God of all the earth, and he had turned to worship Him with all his heart; "He gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." A strong discerning humble-minded man he must have been. By his simple faith in God, untrammelled with the narrowness and exclusiveness of the Pharisees, and by his perception of what true religion consisted in, he was already a Christian in all but the full knowledge of God which Christ alone can give, the consequent ability to receive the full benefit of the Holy Spirit, and the clear and perfect hope of the resurrection to everlasting life. And all this he was in the face of the taunts of his brother-officers. For, with all the scorn of the world for the things of the spirit, increased by their anger at their comrade adopting what they would call a Jewish superstition, they

would not fail to let him know what they thought of him. He would have to maintain his piety in the face, too, of the exclusiveness of the Jews themselves. It might be softened down among a few of the better sort from whom he had learned to worship God, but it would not be entirely effaced and would so far deprive him of human encouragement in his faithful walk.

It was "with all his house" that he believed, that is with his whole household, not only his wife and children, but also his slaves and other dependents; and if we cannot infer from this that they all had the same living faith that he himself had, we may at least learn that he was doing his best to teach it to them—another proof of the strong quality of his own faith. It is not every Christian man that has sufficient quiet courage and conviction to worship God with his whole house. Do we all I do not say have regular worship in our own homes, but do we all take any interest in the religious standing of those dependent upon us? Do we never, for example, from pure selfishness give them work that cuts them off utterly from joining in the public worship of the Church? Do we never in this or in any like way quench the smoking flax of many a tender faith that would otherwise have burnt up into a bright flame, but would, now extinguished, leave a spirit that has become not only careless but even seared? One might take a worse model than Cornelius even in his pre-Christian days.

Philip the Deacon had already settled in Cæsarea, and St. Paul had rested there as he was returning from his first reception by the believers in Jerusalem; Jerusalem and Cæsarea were also too near by distance, and too closely linked by official intercourse to allow us to suppose that Cornelius had never heard the name of Christ. Indeed, later St. Peter in his address distinctly declares that the matter of Jesus Christ was one that was familiar to all. "That word," he says, "ye know which was published throughout all Judæa." On the other hand, we can easily believe that the Jewish friends of Cornelius, men of position and linked with the influential families of Jerusalem, would hardly have been able, even if they had been willing to give him a fair presentment of the truth.

It is without any word of explanation as to what led up to it, that we are told an Angel or messenger of God came to him, and said that his prayers and almsgiving had found favour with God, and that if he would send for Simon Peter he would learn from his mouth what he ought to do. But it is, I think, a fair inference from this and the general position that he had already been troubled in mind about this Jesus of Whom he had heard such strange things, and doubtful whether he ought not to recognise Him as the Messiah, or at least make serious enquiry concerning Him. In any case he eagerly obeys the direction, and that very hour sends to Joppa three messengers like-minded with himself to entreat St. Peter to come to him. As we know, the Apostle accepting the lesson taught him by the vision of the eating of the clean and the unclean animals, went with the messengers without any hesitation, although, as he explains to Cornelius and his company, he considered it an unlawful thing for a Jew like himself to associate with or visit a Gentile. And even while he was still speaking to them of Jesus Christ, they were convinced of the truth and the Holy Spirit fell on them, so that without more ado he called for water and baptised them.

The equality in Christ of Jew and Gentile seems to us, and rightly too, of the very essence of our faith, but it was not an obvious thing to a Jew, even a Christian Jew of our Lord's generation; and still less, was it obvious that there should be such vital far-reaching equality that all the ceremonial barriers of the law should themselves fall away; and the lesson in these things which St. Peter received from the affair of Cornelius so far from being unnecessary, was not sufficient to preserve him from falling back in Antioch into his old unbrotherly observances.

But the lesson now given in Cæsarea was a great one, and St. Peter, though he may not have realised its full bearing, undoubtedly profited greatly by it, and warmly commended it to the reluctant Judaisers in Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, it was through Cornelius that the council which met there a little later was able with such unhesitating voice to assert the freedom of the Gentile from the Mosaic law. For it was on the uncircumcised Cornelius that the Spirit fell, as it was to the uncircumcised Abraham that the promises were made.

So from more than one point of view the story of Cornelius impresses upon us that in Christ we are dealing with realities. The good and earnest man full of charity for his fellows is near God, nay, he that loveth is born of God. To him that hath more is given, and he obtains that knowledge of Christ which is salvation. May God grant that we, round whom the light of that knowledge has always shone, may have the same sincere mind as Cornelius and walking all our days as children of the light may be finally received into the happy company of those who are at rest. That rest is theirs, not merely because they have laid aside the mortal body, but because they are wholly one with Christ.

Cornelius

BY REV. D. FAIRWEATHER, M.A.

"A certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius."—Acts x. 1.

Scripture is peculiarly rich in character sketches. Within its pages are to be found pictures of men's lives representing every shade and phase of human character, thus lending to its teaching an additional charm for the reader. There is no more living book than the Bible. It is full of human interest. Those who are not familiar with it lose much of the pure pleasure of good literature, and neglect a unique opportunity of making themselves acquainted with human nature just as it is. For it is noteworthy in respect of the Bible characters that they are drawn to the life; the evil is told as well as the good. Into this great portrait gallery I wish you to come with me and look at the picture of Cornelius.

It is not one of the great portraits; it makes no pretension to the strength or gigantic proportions of a Paul or of a Peter; there is nothing in it of their massive features, but perhaps that may be all the better for us since it will be more within our reach, and more on our own level. Pauls and Peters are very scarce: it is the lot of most of us to be ordinary people, nothing out of the common either in position or in character, or in opportunity, but destined to fill that sphere in which providence has placed us, and filling it best when we count it all the honour we aspire to, simply to be God's servants. The portrait of Cornelius is of this nature and of this size. He is described as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." We know very little of his history. He was an officer of some rank in the Roman army. His name indicates that he belonged to one of the noble families of Rome. The Romans knew no more honourable name than that of the Cornelian house; some of their most famous men had sprung from that stock, and doubtless when this descendant of the family entered the army, his dreams would be of achieving on the field of battle still greater glory to add to the lustre of the family name. Little did he think of the kind of fame he was to gain, as little perhaps as Peter thought of becoming a fisher of men those long summer days when he dragged the Lake of Galilee with his fisherman's net. He rose to the rank of centurion, captain of a hundred soldiers. A company or band was made up of a thousand men.

The captain of these was called a tribune, and under him were ten centurions, each in command of a hundred. Cornelius was in Cesarea with his company, and a rare example he shewed them. Living a soldier's life, which we know from history was at that time very corrupt, he yet served God devoutly with all his house.

This is worth noting. You hear it said that it is difficult to live a good life amid evil surroundings, where the tone of companions is adverse to goodness. In spite of ourselves it is not possible to be uncontaminated when those in the same workshop or office or business have no fear of God before their eyes. It is all very well to speak of cherishing a high ideal, but how is it possible when five out of every six of those with whom we are daily thrown into contact have no ideal at all, or one so low that it is worse than none? I grant you it is not easy. Far from it, it is indeed difficult, far more difficult than one who has not experienced it knows. But that it is possible the testimony of such as Cornelius abundantly proves. Scripture does not tell us anything about the difficulties with which he had to contend, but we can understand something of the effort it cost him to keep true to God in the atmosphere of a soldiers' barracks. Some of you know what is the moral atmosphere of the business office or the workshop where young men are thrown together. It compares favourably with that of a barracks. Yet the name of Cornelius has come down to us as one who, amidst prevailing godlessness, was pre-eminent for his piety.

We see before us "a devout man"; that is to say, a man of serious and reverent spirit, of an earnest turn of mind, conscientious up to his light, seeking with all his heart to be true to the best within him. By birth and training he must have been a pagan. When he worshipped his father's gods at Rome he was serious in his worship; he bowed down reverently, humbly, and devoutly, and we may be sure that when he embraced the pure worship of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he would become not less but more devout. He belonged to the same class of men as Nathanael and Nicodemus. He was conscious of the existence of higher powers, and of the obligation to worship. There are people to whom devoutness is impossible. They are cursed with a spirit of frivolity. There is nothing serious in them. I have known men to whom nothing appeared sacred, to whom reverence for anything was unknown, who seemed possessed with a light-hearted frivolity of disposition that made them look on everything as a subject for ill-timed wit and merriment. There is no hope, humanly speaking, for such. Cornelius was a devout man. To him there was mystery in life; there were powers beyond him; and before these he bowed his head and worshipped. May not this have been the secret of his finding out the true God? He lived up to the best he knew; and when providence placed him in Cesarea, where he must have found some faithful worshippers, he found the light after which he had been seeking. May we not believe that thus God yet comes to many in heathen lands? He has never left Himself without a witness, and it is one gleam of light amid what otherwise seems darkness that thus the earnest seeker after truth finds his way to the bosom of the Eternal.

Cornelius was more than devout: "he feared God with all his house." He was one of those men who make the fear of God the basis of all their actions, who make that the touchstone by which they test their conduct, the law by which they regulate their lives, the motive that determines their whole course of action. The fear of the Lord was always before his eyes. Like the Psalmist he could say, "I have set Jehovah continually before me."

The fear of the Lord may mean two things. It may mean the fear which springs from dread, the fear which, traced back to its source, is the consequence

of guilt, the fear which, were it possible, would make us hide ourselves from God, the fear that Felix felt when Paul reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Or it may mean the fear which springs from love, the veneration, reverence, obedience a son renders a father, which is mingled with the apprehension of his displeasure incurred by misconduct—a restraining, wholesome, praiseworthy fear.

To Cornelius the fear of God was of the latter kind. It had its origin in a right motive. It was the fear which held in reverence God's holy character, and never would bow before Him without a sense of deep unworthiness and sinfulness, a fear which led him to own God's authority over his life, and to do His will from the heart fervently, ungrudgingly, and willingly. He did not suffer the customs and usages of those around him to determine his conduct; he did not suffer social sanction to usurp the place of divine. In all things he sought to be well-pleasing unto God, setting himself daily in the light of His law that he might the more easily see his own mistakes and sins; and he was spurred to effort by the fear lest he should lose God's approbation. On this wise and sure foundation he built the house of his life.

In this fear of God he exercised all his household. Cornelius had a church in his home. His children, his servants, his guests were all taught the fear of the Lord, and came under its influence. In this he was a great example to Christian households. The earnest devout worshipper will worship God in his own house. There will be a family altar from which the prayers of the household will ascend, and where the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving will be offered. I do not think the importance of family worship can be overstated. There is no influence remains so long with a child as that of his early days. If the children could be won for Christ while their hearts are young and tender, what might we not save them from, what influence might they not exert upon the life of their generation! It needs great wisdom, great grace, great waiting upon God for guidance and help. Nothing is easier than to give young people a distaste for religious exercises. Family prayers—formal, dull, without any life or reality in them—what a weariness they have been to many young people, and how gladly they have made shift to escape! But conducted reverently, simply, earnestly, with ardent sincerity, followed up by the beautiful, gracious influence of a life that is given to Christ, and is rich in the graces of the Christian character—blessed are the homes wherein it is so, and blessed are the children who grow up in them. Alas, what shall be said of the homes in which there are indeed family prayers, but nothing to back them up! Oh, for the genuine simplicity of a Christly life, that communes with Christ, that radiates something of the winsome ways, which when He was on earth made timid women bless Him, and little children glad to be taken in His arms! If the hour of prayer be wearisome and joyless, no real, uplifting, blessed hour to ourselves, can we wonder that our children find it dull?

Cornelius feared God with all his house: this must have included his servants too. Do we realise our responsibility for them? Do we deal kindly and considerately with them? Do we commend Christ to them by our conduct? Example is the best sermon we can preach. That is the kind that will appeal to them, the sermon whose sentences are written in upright, kindly deeds. It will go home to them when all the rounded sentences of a pulpit discourse will pass in at one ear and out at the other. They will forget a sermon, but thoughtfulness and kindness they will remember all their days. Masters and servants have drifted much apart in recent years; the one is apt to regard the other with suspicion, and no doubt the fault has not been all on the one side or on the other, but I am sure that it was the influence of Cornelius himself that brought all that

household at Caesarea under the fear of God. It was his personal influence, his devout, earnest, godly character that wrought the change. He, the master of the house, himself feared God, and so all his house were taught the secret.

Note briefly the two remaining features of his character. He was a liberal man: "he gave much alms to the people." That was the form his liberality took. He had learned the compassion of Christ for the needy, he had learned one of the secrets of Christian living to give. "Give," said Christ, "and it shall be given to you." How different, how strangely different from the teaching of the world: "Take, and you shall have; keep, and you shall possess!" So speaks the world, such is its law of life. Give away, Christ said, and it shall be given to you again. What shall be given for giving? Goods, money, material things? No. Jesus knew what He was saying; to give these hoping to receive again is not giving at all. Do not even the Pharisees the same? No, give these if you have them, but first give the willing heart, give yourself, give your love, give your help to a neighbour, be the good Samaritan; spend, hoping to receive nothing again, and great will be your reward in Heaven. Cornelius had learned that lesson. I do not suppose there was a church at Caesarea, but, had there been, Cornelius would have been one of its most liberal supporters.

To his devoutness, godliness, and liberality, he added this other distinguishing mark of a Christian character: "he prayed to God alway." It was the secret of all his goodness; he communed with God, he was a man of prayer. No one ever attains to great things in the Christian life who does not pray. Prayer is the atmosphere in which the soul is braced, and by it we keep ourselves in contact with God and Christ and things divine. It is the conscious adoration of the Almighty, the homage rendered to Him according to His due, the making known of our requests and the giving of thanks for God's benefits. As a means of keeping us near to God, as a means of renewing our inward life, it is indispensable for every Christian man and woman. "Behold," it was said of Saul after his conversion, "behold, he prayeth"; that was given by the Angel as a sure sign of his changed life. Cornelius was a man of prayer. Nor was it an occasional exercise. He prayed to God alway, like Job, of whom we read, "Thus did he continually." It was the root of the whole matter. The prayer of faith brings down God into our lives, and that means the answer to all our needs.

Such then was Cornelius. What it was possible for him to be, living in circumstances the reverse of favourable to godliness, it is possible for us to become: devout, God-fearing, liberal according to our ability, praying to God alway. God's hand is not shortened, His grace is not stinted. You who find it hard to be what you would like to be, think of the secret of the centurion's success: He prayed to God alway. Try that plan, and you will not fail.

Family Religion

BY REV. FREDERICK FIELD, LL.D.

"A devout man," &c.—Acts x. 2.

This is said of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, consequently by birth a Gentile, but according to such light as he possessed, a worshipper of the true God, and presently to be admitted, by a special revelation, into the true Church of God. To this distinction he was recommended, no doubt, by his *personal* religion, his faith and charity; he was "a devout man, who gave much alms to the people,

and prayed to God always." But the particular point, to which I would now call your attention, is the *domestic piety* of this excellent person; he was not only "a devout man," but "one that feared God *with all his house*." From which words I shall take occasion to offer a few remarks upon the subject of *Family Religion*.

Let us begin then by enquiring how, in all probability, it came to pass that Cornelius, a devout man himself, established the same religious character amongst the members of his family: he "feared God with all his house"; his *children*, that is, and his *servants*.

1. With respect to his *children*, there was no room for choice; *their* dispositions he could but take as he found them, and endeavour, by the most unremitted care and attention, to mould them into habits of goodness and piety. But his *servants* he might choose, and we may be sure, that in choosing them, he had respect to their previously known or reputed religious principles. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," is a rule which applies as much to the connexion of master and servant, as to that of husband and wife, so far at least as to exclude from a religious family all such inmates as have not the fear of God before their eyes. The Psalmist's household, we may well suppose, was a model of family religion, and he tells us what was his rule. "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me. He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." It does not, however, follow that we are to shut our doors against all, who are not so grounded and settled in the way of righteousness, as to remove all anxiety with respect to their future course. This would be to let slip many opportunities of doing good; of instructing the ignorant, preserving the simple, fixing the undecided; yea! sometimes of "converting a sinner from the error of his ways," and "saving a soul from death." In this manner, a pious household may be considered as a kind of nursery, in which weak and sickly plants, and such as, in the unfriendly climate of the world, soon languish and die, are taken in and sheltered. But when we see dispositions decidedly bad, incorrigible levity, invincible ignorance, a jesting at divine things, or which is almost as sad, an utter want of religious sensibility—no one who desires to preside over a godly family will take such a hopeless character into it.

2. Having selected his household with a due regard to their previous character and attainments, we cannot doubt that Cornelius tried every means of giving their minds a still more decided turn for religion. Indeed, with persons of an ingenuous disposition, the mere silent example of piety goes a great way. To use the Psalmist's comparison, "it is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his garment." Such is the influence of genuine piety in the head of a family, insensibly, but surely, making its way to the hearts of all, who live in the daily contemplation of it, and going down to the lowest and least honourable members of the domestic body. Thus, we read in the 7th verse that Cornelius "called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually." Here we have cause and effect; the soldier became devout by waiting continually on the person of his master, and observing the beauty of holiness which shone forth in his daily conversation. Still more powerful is the *injection*, if I may so call it, of a whole family, living under the habitual influence of religious principles, and in the daily practice of religious exercises. Cornelius, however, did not trust to this; he employed active exertion to recommend religion. He considered the soul of every member of his household, as in a certain manner, committed to his charge, and he set himself to save it.

struction was one of his principal means. In the house of God he sat with others, as a learner ; in his own house he occupied the room of the Teacher ; and perhaps, his homely and familiar illustrations of divine truth, were oftentimes more successful than the more studied efforts of the Minister. *Family prayer* was, no doubt, another of his means. His household was a little Church in itself, and he the Priest of it ; in which capacity he assembled them, morning and evening, before the Throne of Grace ; and desired of God for all, and in the name of all, those good things which he would fain have had each of them desire and ask for himself. No doubt also he embraced other opportunities, such as spring from constant association, and intimate knowledge of individual character, to speak " a word in season " according to the disposition and attainments of each. And with all this, he never lost sight of the great object, of making religion *attractive* to those whom he sought to win ; and convincing them that " her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." He showed, by the cheerfulness of his own temper, that there is no necessary connexion between gloom and godliness ; but that on the contrary, the proper effect of true religion is to cheer the heart, and unknit the brow ; and to make him who has once cordially embraced it, " go on his way rejoicing." He did not require too much of those who were, perhaps, only just entering upon a religious course ; and took care, at whatever stage of their progress, not to weary them with the strictness of his rules, or the prolixity of his devotional exercises. In short, he was " gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." While he did not omit to " warn them that were unruly," his disposition rather led him to " comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to be patient towards all."

3. Still we must not suppose that, whether as a Father or a Master, he was all gentleness. He knew how to exercise on fitting occasions that authority, which in both these characters belonged to him. Notwithstanding all his pains, it is much to be feared that some of the members of his family would continue strangers to " the power of godliness," if indeed they did not deny and renounce it. What was to be done with such persons ? Persuasion failing to win, authority must be exerted to restrain. Here Eli failed. It is written, " his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The head of a family never hesitates to use this authority, where his worldly interests are concerned. In every well-ordered house certain rules are established, which all the inmates of it understand and conform themselves to. Devout heads of families scruple not to employ the same authority for higher ends. Abraham is an instance. " I know him," said God, " that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." You all remember Joshua's resolution : " As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What ! it might have been said to him ; can you make them serve the Lord, whether they are inclined to it or no ? Can you ensure that every member of your family shall be a serious and a godly character ? No ; he would have replied, I can do no such thing. " The Lord hath made the heart of man for Himself ; He turneth it whithersoever He will." He alone is able to " order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men " ; to make them " love the thing that He commandeth, and desire that which He doth promise." But this shall not prevent me from doing what I can ; I will have inviolable rules, for the maintenance of God's honour in my family. There shall be no profaneness, no Sabbath-breaking, no jesting at things sacred, in my house. I will not allow any member of the family to absent himself from the daily religious exercises of it. This, I will say, is the law of the house ; behold, this is the law of the house. And on the Lord's Day, we will all go up together to the House of God ; we will go as the Israelites came forth out of Egypt, " with our young and

with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our men-servants, and maid-servants ; will go up, as a family, to meet the other families, that call upon the name of the Lord ; and to exhort and encourage one another, with full purpose of heart, to cleave unto Him.

But to this it may be objected, that to insist on an outward compliance with the forms of religion, when you cannot ensure the spirit and power of it, is only to make men hypocrites ; and to do them more harm than good.

In answer to which we observe - (1) that while we exert our authority over our dependents to enforce a decent observance of the forms of religion we also employ suitable means to induce them to give their hearts unto the Lord ; (2) that by making them attend the ordinances of religion, be they ever so unmoved at first, we put them in the way of being moved : we bring them under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. If after all our care, a child or a servant should show no signs of being renewed in the spirit of his mind, should afford no present hope of being anything more than a formal Christian, and one that makes a fair shew in the flesh ; will any one say that this is nothing ? far less will any one say that it is worse than nothing ? It is certainly better than to have no religion at all ; and it may lead to true and vital religion in the end. Ninety nine times the prayer, or the sermon, or the private word of admonition may get no further than the ears : the hundredth time, God being gracious, it may sink into the heart. Or by whatever means, when once the change is wrought, it will be seen that all the previous culture bestowed upon that person was not in vain. There will at least be less ignorance to enlighten and less prejudice to overcome. May it not be said that the seeds of holiness were already there, and only waited for a gracious rain from the Lord to quicken them ? That being come, they will now shoot forth upwards, and take root downwards ; and the progress of such a person in divine knowledge and grace will be rapid. Once more therefore, we repeat, let no head of a family scruple to use his authority, as well as his influence, on the side of religion. Use them both, and use them together. Either without the other will be of no avail : both together, with the Divine blessing, which will never be denied to faithful and fervent prayer, can hardly fail of success. I have now stated what appear to be the most likely means for maintaining the worship of God in a family. The advantages of such a regulation need hardly be pointed out to those who profess to fear God themselves.

Whatever can be said in praise of personal religion, is a good argument to prove the advantage of family religion, because a family is made up of persons. In short, if godliness be good in itself, it must make everything which partakes of it good ; whether it be a godly individual, or a godly family, or a godly place, or a godly people. Yet not to leave this part of the subject entirely untouched, I shall just mention two considerations, which are not always properly attended to.

1. That the profession of piety is a bond of union between the members of a family. " Behold," says the Psalmist, " how good and pleasant a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity." Family-disunion is the greatest curse which men can inflict upon themselves. A household divided against itself cannot stand. Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work ; and the more they are pent up and straitened for room, the more mischievous they are. Hence, divisions are bad in a nation ; worse in a town ; worst of all in a house. Now religious principle goes to cut off all those common occasions of disagreement, which arise from the members of a family withholding from one another, what is their due. It regulates the duties of husbands and wives, the two governing powers of a family, the effects of whose good or bad

understanding is felt through every branch of it. Parents and children, who are united not only by ties of blood, but by the obligations of their common profession, will have an additional motive if such were wanting to fulfil their duties to each other. Masters will give unto their servants that which is just and equal, knowing that they also have a Master in Heaven. Servants will not be contented with eye-service, and constrained obedience; but in performing the commonest duties of their station, will perform them, as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. But not only are actual breaches and fallings out to be avoided; in order to make a happy and united family, there must be nothing like coolness or jealousy; there must be the most perfect cordiality and affection between the several members of it. Now nothing serves so well to knit persons together in love as Christian sympathy. It draws hearts to each other. It makes men all of one mind. It makes them feel, and act, as if they were one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Wherever it is sincere, this must always be the effect of it; and even the profession of it, the outward participation of religious exercises, must have a tendency to promote peace and union, as far as it goes. Will those, who begin the day with the joint offering of prayer and praise to their Heavenly Father, rise up from their devotions to those bickerings and contentions, which, in some families, are renewed every morning? Or can those go to rest with malice and hatred in their hearts, who just before might be seen kneeling together in the same act of worship; and beseeching God to make them a household fearing Him, and kindly affectioned to each other? If it be possible (and we do not deny that it is *possible*), does not this show the necessity of availing ourselves of every practicable means of counteracting that inherent malevolence of the human heart, which can stand out against such influences as these?

2. The profession of piety in a family is a bond of union between that family, and others, who profess the same. It is a mark, by which they are enabled to know and draw closer to each other. The families that call upon the name of the Lord have a fellow-feeling, one with another, which other families want. They choose and cultivate the society of each other. They form family-connexions. They are pledges for each other's offspring at the font. They console each other in seasons of affliction. They rejoice together in prosperous turns. They visit and communicate with one another at all times. And on such occasions there is no strangeness or awkwardness between them, as to the habits or regulations of the family. They walk by the same rule. The guest feels perfectly at home. The hour of worship is known and welcomed. The same Bible is laid on the table, and opened. The same petitions, perhaps in the very same words, are offered up. When they rise from their knees, they say one to another, We are one. We belong to separate families, but to one household of faith. Our earthly houses of this tabernacle are apart, but we have the same building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. And these imperfect exercises, in which we have now joined, are an earnest of that perfect and heavenly worship, in which we shall one day join with all the family of the redeemed in Heaven.

A Devout Soldier

BY REV. GEORGE E. JELF, M.A.

"*A devout soldier.*"—*Acts x. 7.*

We read that the centurion, on whom this devout soldier waited continually, was himself a devout man. Like master, like man. What the officer of a com-

pany is, that the men of the company are drawn to be. And even if a Christian officer cannot see his men all Christians at once, his example will tell, here on one, there on another ; and each of these will become a seed of good in the regiment.

But what is a devout soldier ? The devout character is described at the beginning of the chapter. Cornelius is spoken of in the language of that Spirit Who searcheth our hearts, as " one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." This is what we should all aim at, whether we are soldiers or civilians, whether we are clergy or laity—to cherish that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and the crown of life—to teach our children and our household the good and the right way—to do all we can to help the brethren—and to pray without ceasing.

But the devout soldier must be, in a manner, more than this, because of his special profession, and his peculiar difficulties and temptations. This very expression seems to tell us of an unusual character—a remarkable self-conquest. Granted, that he lives under an excellent discipline—granted, that in a well-ordered land his motto is, " Defence, not defiance"—granted, that he has the high privilege of shielding his king and his country—still, there are difficulties in his way. He must meet all sorts of companions, some of them very idle and unworthy ; he gets more or less accustomed to evil talk and to neglect of prayer ; he is specially solicited to sin ; even his religious exercises may seem dull formal parade services to him ; and he is tempted to become brutally indifferent to human life.

How is it, then, that clergymen and even ladies have so much sympathy with those in the army ?

Partly, no doubt, because of the prevalence of that discipline just spoken of—partly because of the quiet obedience, the heroic self-sacrifice, of all ranks—but partly also because of the striking contrast shown between what a man is tempted to be, and what he is—most of all, in the instance of those, happily not a few, whom the Bible would simply call " devout soldiers."

Mark, I pray you, what is meant, and how the contrast strikes us. It may be that among those gathered here there are those never likely to join our citizen-soldiers, never able to draw sword in the regular army, who yet can thoroughly appreciate the soldier's heart, since they have it themselves, and the soldier's secret conflict, as being like their own daily warfare.

Such persons will enter even into a minister's sketch of the devout soldier.

1. First, then, as the word actually means, he takes care to honour God—he looks well to the worship of the Lord. The observant eye which fell asleep directly after it had guided the troops by the light of the stars to their place of battle and of victory, and which, ere it slept the last sleep, desired once more—so the nursing sister told me—to look up to the glorious Heaven, was but a type of those who always watch for God, and wait upon His will, and work for others in reliance on His directing Providence. Among any companions, under any circumstances, the soldier who is devout, like the devout civilian, careth for God first—he cannot march, he dare not sleep, he will not begin the fight, without prayer. In time of war he is no farther from God than in time of peace. He would no more drive Christ out of the barrack-room than out of the Church. He would no more refuse to kneel to Christ in the presence of his comrades, than to kneel to receive a charge of the enemy's cavalry. He serves the King, if need be, at the cost of his life ; nor would he count his life dear to himself, so that he might faithfully serve the Lord.

11. Then again, he does all little things in the Great Name of the Saviour. He not only lives a life of devotion, but also a devoted life. No event, no duty,

is too slight, but that God may be honoured therein. A devout soldier is thorough at all points; he is not one character on parade, and another in the city—not brave for man, and a coward before the Lord—not alive in the light, and slothful in soldiering—not eager in the discharge of great responsibilities, and ready to despise a humble post. He is always the same; not, of course, that he is always at his best; but he keeps the same standard before him—does not forget that he is “a man under authority”—aims, at all events, at doing all to the glory of God. He is not one who thinks of God just now and then on a peaceful Sunday, and casts all thought of Him away when the trumpet sounds for action. Rather he is one who remembers God, and works and suffers for Him, at all times—

Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train,
Turns his necessity to glorious gain—”

or, to quote another and yet another passage from Wordsworth's “Happy Warrior,”—

Whose high endeavours are an inward light,
That makes the path before him always bright.

* * * * *

Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim.

III. But further, the devout soldier is the champion of the weak: he has a chivalrous regard for all women. That is surely no ideal picture of the maiden knight, so brave and chaste, godly and manly, too:—

My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.

Only we must recollect, that if chivalry is still to be “a great and living power,” it must rest, not, as in the middle ages, on the principle of honour, but on the Love of Christ. It is for His sake that the man who is a Christian, whatever be his earthly calling, labours to rescue the fallen—and (still better) to prevent the degradation of women and children. They are Christ's members: they are, however little regarded by the world, so highly honoured by Almighty God that He gave His own Son to be born of a woman, and made a little child, and then to die for them all. And the true soldier can have no nobler aim. As Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did, by His teaching and His actions, raise the woman to be “the glory of the man,” so should all who follow Him and who fight under His Banner do their very best, not to lift woman out of her proper sphere, but to make the sphere where God has placed her entirely honourable—to defend her from insult—to save her from herself. Many soldiers are fearful hindrances to the weak; but among them there rises up the devout soldier, and shows himself a deliverer, a conqueror of his own lusts and pleasures, a defender of those in peril, because he sees the Cross of Jesus going on before.

IV. And there is one other thing which we can all learn from the thorough soldier. We want something more than the fierce staunchness of a dog—we need the sturdy courage of a man, the mind and heart of a Christian. Charles

George Gordon may be blamed as a fatalist, but his bravery was not that of one who rushes on his fate, but of one who fears God, and knows that therefore he has nothing else to fear—he endures hardness, as each of you should do, “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Such a one can wait and stand on guard, and not only actively but passively resist. Wellington was as truly great in the grand patience of the Lines of Torres Vedras as in the splendid storming of Badajos or in the irresistible advance over the Pyrenees. And we Englishmen are proud of Sir John Moore, not only because of the brilliant victory in which he fell at Corunna, but because of his wonderful retreat from Astorga, which baffled even the stupendous march of Napoleon.

And this same patience, this power of bearing what seems against us, this vigorous and practical resolve to turn a defeat into a victory, must be yours and ours. And it shall be so if we are looking unto Jesus. He gives us warning of the coming peril, that we may be prepared—shows us the trouble which we can only bear in His strength—makes us realise the tumult of the Church’s war, that in Him we may have peace—and says to us, as He has been saying through all these past generations: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

St. Peter’s Vision

BY REV. JOHN FAWCETT, M.A.

“Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.”—Acts x. 9.

In Peter were fulfilled those words of Job, “In a dream in a vision of the night when deep sleep falleth upon men in slumbering upon the bed, then He openeth the ears of men and readeth their instruction.” This was eminently the case here: the vision of Peter was richly instructive, and leading to the most important consequences—a vessel, “as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” Sometimes men act in character even in their dreams; but not always, nor often. I don’t know a more delusive test by which any one might try his own spirit, than if he were to judge of it by his dreams. Peter, however, in this vision seems completely to have sustained his usual character. That quick determination and firmness of purpose which commonly distinguished him, appear on this occasion. To a man who was very hungry a vessel full of creatures fit for food must have been a tempting object; and when the voice, which he seems to have understood to be the Lord’s, came, saying, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat,” one would have thought it must have been a welcome voice. But there were unclean animals in that vessel. Hungry, therefore, as he was, he would not touch it; but said, “Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth”; and though the vessel was thrice presented, and the invitation thrice given, he refused to the last, and the vessel was taken up to Heaven.

But when he awoke from his trance, and thought of the vision, he considered what it could mean. Was it indeed the voice of God that he had heard? Had God Himself pronounced unclean things clean, and forbidden him to make them common? The thought was strange to him; yet if God had spoken it so it must be. And could he recollect nothing in the discourses of his Divine Master which looked like this? Jesus, perhaps, had never entered into the question

whether the distinction of meats should be done away. But the spirit of His teaching went directly to show that meats were indifferent, one as good as another. The Pharisees would not eat with unwashed hands—they thought that meat so eaten would defile them. But Jesus showed that it was not what went into a man which defiled him, but that which came out of a man; not the meat which entered into his mouth, but the evil thoughts which proceeded from his heart. If his heart was purified from these, no food could pollute him; if his heart was defiled with these, no scrupulosity about food could make him clean. It is not at all improbable that Peter's waking thoughts in reflecting on his vision would thus far bring to his remembrance, and thus far explain, the words of his Master.

But now that vision was to receive a further interpretation, which should show its wide extent and vast importance. For while he was thinking on it, and doubting what it should mean, the messengers of Cornelius stood at Simon's gate, and inquired whether Simon, surnamed Peter, lodged there. It was not necessary for any one of Simon's household to announce their arrival to Peter. The Spirit of God had Himself said to him, "Behold three men seek thee; arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting; for I have sent them." He therefore went down immediately to the messengers of Cornelius, told them that he was the man whom they sought, and inquired of them the cause wherefore they were come. In answer, they related to him the vision of Cornelius, and Peter, having procured a lodging for them in the house of Simon, on the next day set out with them for Cæsarea, taking with him six Christian brethren then dwelling at Joppa.

From the general view which we have thus taken of this event, we may proceed to draw materials for practical improvement. And first we may remark that we have here a second instance of the great honour put upon prayer. A praying Gentile is the first uncircumcised person admitted into the Christian Church. A praying Apostle the instrument employed to bring about this happy consummation. And to each was his own blessing given at the very time when he was in the exercise of prayer. The case of Peter is peculiarly instructive. There is no doubt but he would observe the Jewish hours of prayer—indeed, we know he did, for in the third chapter we find him and John at that hour repairing to the temple; but here we behold him offering up his prayers at noon; and we may well believe that it was his usual practice, that like David he would say, "Evening and morning, and at noon day will I pray." It is well for Christians to fix for themselves particular hours of prayer; and though they should not be in bondage to such hours, yet without good reason they should not depart from them. There is in our earthly hearts such a backwardness to so spiritual a duty, that if the return of the hour does not call it to our remembrance, and if we do not charge it upon our conscience to observe the hour, the world will find us other employment, and exercises of prayer become unfrequent. Peter observed the time, and was careful also in selecting the place for prayer: in the temple at the stated hours, at other times in the best adapted part of the house. This in Simon's house, and in most houses in Palestine, was the flat topped roof—here he was in privacy, here he was withdrawn from the world, here he could converse with his God unobserved by man.

He affords in this an edifying example to Christians of the present day. The house of God is open to all: at the stated times the rich and the poor may repair thither; and, surely, on the Lord's Day, none, unless the distance of their abode compels them, should be content with a single attendance; but should be glad to offer both their morning and their evening sacrifice. As to private prayer, many, I grant, have not the advantage of an apartment to which they may retire,

and pray in secret, avoiding the appearance of ostentation, and escaping the interruption of the busy world around them. But there is a happiness in the human constitution, which causes that men can accommodate themselves to that to which they are accustomed. Noise is a disturber of sleep ; but men who live in the midst of noisy and bustling scenes, hear not the noise, but can sleep in the midst of it as if in the stillest solitude. And thus a poor Christian, under the influence of Divine grace, may pray with much collectedness of mind and much fervour in the midst of interruptions which would altogether discompose the man who had been accustomed to a more favourable situation. I may add, that what a man's house does not afford, the open field does ; and thither the spiritually-minded Christian will sometimes go for the purpose of secret prayer ; and will find his devotion aided while in the day he surveys the varied scenery around him, or at night lifts up his eyes to the stars in the spangled firmament of heaven.

But wherever a man is praying, whether at church, in his house, or in the field, the great point, and alas ! the rarely accomplished point, is to let prayer be his one business, to be absorbed in it, wholly occupied with it. Peter, while he prayed, was in a trance ; the world was altogether shut out from him. He had no eyes to see, nor ears to hear it. This was supernatural : yet it shows us in some measure what prayer should be. A man in the exercise of it should have his senses, his memory, and imagination, closed against all other objects, and should converse with God alone. He should see nothing but God ; think of nothing but God. This would be the way to behold Heaven indeed opened, and blessings of every kind descending upon him. You will not suppose that I mean that he should, in vision, like Peter, see the Heavens actually opening, and experience some impression on his outward senses. All that I mean is that such fervent communing with God, where a man draws nigh to the Father through the Son, is the very key which opens Heaven, which unlocks its sacred treasures, and brings down the richest gifts both of providence and grace on the head of the supplicant.

Yes, every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. And the vision of Peter affords a lively illustration of this truth, which is so obvious when we reflect upon it, but which we are so apt to overlook. If, instead of buying in the shambles what we know has been taken out of the field, and killed in the slaughter-house, we saw a vessel descend from Heaven, and if, after we had taken out of it what was sufficient for our repast, we saw it again taken up into Heaven, we should feel that the food, thus given, was indeed sent down from God. But in that case the truth would not be more certain than it is now ; it would only be more forced upon our observation. In that case we could only be more forced upon our observation. In that case we could not help seeing it ; but we could not be more sure of it than, by a little reflection, we may at any time make ourselves. For, whence came these creatures into being ? Who made them ? Who gave them the properties which render them fit for meat ? And Who keeps up the successive generations of them from age to age ? There is not a child who is old enough to read and understand the first chapter of Genesis, but can answer these questions. Nay, we know, and Paul himself bears witness to it, that, even without revelation, the natural reason of man is competent to discover that the creatures are the gift of God, that it is He Who giveth rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

For a season, and to answer a particular purpose, a great restriction was put upon these creatures. To the Jews some were allowed, some were forbidden, some were accounted clean, some unclean. But from the beginning it was not so.

The grant to Noah is unlimited—“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb have I given you all things.” And now, that the law with its ceremonies and carnal ordinances is abolished, to us this original grant is restored in all its fulness. The perplexing distinction of meats, always requiring great care, and often occasioning defilement, is done away. We know that “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” O why do we not thus sanctify our meals? and as we pray for our daily bread, why do we not acknowledge it with thanksgiving as the gift of our Father Who is in Heaven? To do so would give a sweetness to the humblest fare, and exalt our ordinary repasts into means of grace. And surely, when all things are become lawful to us, and no other restraints laid on us than those of charity and temperance, our larger liberty demands from us more abundant thanksgiving.

But the doing away of all distinction between clean and unclean in meats, is a light matter in comparison of the doing away of all distinction between clean and unclean in persons. The vessel let down from Heaven, wherein were living creatures of all kinds, both clean and unclean, was intended to represent the Christian Church, into which should be gathered persons from every nation under Heaven. The Jews would be apt to consider all these except themselves unclean, and to refuse communion with them. To remove this prejudice, the vision significantly taught that God had cleansed them: in order to comprehend the full meaning of which word we must understand two things—

First, that he looked upon them as clean, as fit to be received into the covenant. Every person who is born into the world is really unclean—Jew and Gentile alike, for there is no difference. But hitherto God regarded the Jews as clean, and admitted their children by circumcision into his covenant, giving them the seal of righteousness by faith, while the Gentiles He accounted unclean, and such were not admitted unless born in the house of a Jew, and his property; or strangers receiving the law of Moses, and submitting to the rite of circumcision.

But now men of every nation were accounted clean, and could be received into the Church by baptism on professing their faith in Christ; and the children of such parents were holy, and would be admitted into the Christian Church by baptism. Thus it pleased God that those who were once far off, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, should be made nigh. This dispensation was in agreement with the language of the Prophets—Moses, “Rejoice O ye nations with His people”—Isaiah, “I am found of them that sought Me not.” And our Lord Himself taught that “many should come from the east and the west, from the north and from the south, and sit down in the Kingdom of God.” The commission also which He gave to His Apostles was that they should go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Hence, as many as professed the faith of Christ, and were baptized, and also the children of those who so professed, were accounted clean, so far as to be acknowledged as members of the visible Church of Christ. Yet many of these, though outwardly clean and children of the Kingdom, remained inwardly unclean and children of the wicked one; and unless changed in heart, instead of sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, would be cast into outer darkness where would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But the covenant of the Gospel is not an imperfect covenant. It not only brings within the pale of the Church those who under the law were accounted unclean, taking away their legal uncleanness, and giving them a place and a name among the people of God; but it provides also for their inward cleansing, for the

purifying of their hearts by faith, and making them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Brethren, you all are in one sense clean ; you are by baptism made members of the visible Church of Christ, and your children are entitled to the same Baptism and the same Church membership. But as the circumcision of the Jew, if he kept not the law, was counted as uncircumcision, so your Baptism, if from the heart you believe not unto righteousness, will be counted as no baptism. You are pledged to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not repent and believe in Jesus, you break your baptismal engagement, and forfeit your baptismal privileges : but if from the heart you do indeed believe in Him, He is able to save you to the uttermost.

By nature you were all unclean, and in practice have departed from the holy law of God, some more, some less openly. But His grace can overcome the corruption of nature : and when, in answer to your prayers for cleansing, He says, " I will ; be ye clean " ; then shall you be clean indeed. He will lead you not only to an outward correctness of conduct, but to an inward love of holiness. He will put His laws in your minds and write them in your hearts, and conform you to His own image in righteousness and true holiness. Thus has He through successive ages been purifying those who believe on Him. He received them unclean ; He made them clean : and thus will He continue to do to the end of time. Then when His work of grace is done, the great vessel filled with men originally of all characters, and of every nation and people and tongue, will be taken up finally into Heaven ; and Jesus, having sanctified and cleansed His Church with the washing of water by the word, will present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but holy and without blemish.

The First Gentile Christian

BY VERY REV. C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

" What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."—Acts x. 15.

We have often had occasion to notice how God, designing to send one of His servants on a special mission, first prepares and instructs his mind for a work to which otherwise he might have felt repugnance. It was so with Philip and the Ethiopian : it was so with Ananias and Saul : it is so again with Peter and Cornelius. Peter was a man full of prepossessions and prejudices on the subject of religious differences. " The middle wall of partition " between Jew and Gentile was for him an impassable barrier : he could not imagine a Gentile being brought into God's Church otherwise than through the sacrament of circumcision. Nothing less than a direct intimation of the will of God could suffice to make him obey the call of one who was no Israelite. We may blame him ; we may call it bigoted and narrow-minded ; but perhaps before we close the book this evening we may have seen that, without his excuse, we are all too ready to imitate his example.

The God Whom we serve is a considerate as well as a compassionate God. He takes thought for His servants. He does not suffer them to be surprised into disobedience. If He is about to send them an unexpected and an improbable commission, He sends them first a notice of it and a key to its meaning. Thus it was here. The men sent by Cornelius were approaching the end of their journey, about noon on the day following that of his vision, when Peter went up to the housetop for a season of seclusion and prayer. There he was, alone upon the flat

Eastern roof, looking only upon sea and sky, his mind filled with those holy and magnificent thoughts which are so congenial to the contemplation of those two grandest features of nature. As time went on he became conscious of hunger; and while food was preparing for him, "he fell into a trance." In his trance he saw a vision. From the open sky there came down the appearance of a great sheet-like vessel, let down by its four corners till it rested upon the earth. As he gazed upon its contents he saw all manner of beasts and birds and creeping things, herded indiscriminately within it. At the same moment a voice came to him, bidding him, in his hunger, to "kill and eat." The Apostle remonstrated against such a breach of the Levitical Law. "Not so, Lord," he pleaded: lay not upon my conscience such a burden: "for I never" so transgressed the Mosaic statutes as to "eat anything common (defiled) or unclean." But the voice replied, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Three times this strange scene was repeated; the same command, the same remonstrance, and the same reply; and then all disappeared, and Peter was left to muse alone upon the purport of the vision. While he was thus engaged, the Holy Spirit announced to him that it was but the prelude to a call of duty. Three men were already seeking him; he must arise, and go down, and set out with them on a journey, assured that He, the Spirit of God, had sent them.

It was even so. He found at the gate the messengers of Cornelius, and on hearing from them a brief account of their errand—how Cornelius, a centurion, a just and God-fearing man, bearing a high character among his Jewish neighbours, had been warned of God by a holy Angel to send for him to his house and to hear words from him—he at once invited them in, entertained them for the night, and on the morrow started with them for Cæsarea.

The history is full of lessons for us.

1. There is the duty of one who is as it were "watching for the morning"; waiting for a clearness of faith and hope which as yet he has not. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." "Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by it": and whatsoever we lack, whether of knowledge or of comfort, God, in His own good time, "shall reveal even this unto us." "In the way of Thy judgements have we waited for Thee." "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." Cornelius used his light, and prayed for more. Cornelius was already just, already reverent, already a worshipper with his house, already liberal and charitable, above all, he was already earnest and constant in prayer, before he knew anything of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. What, my brethren, are we who know? Which of his characteristics does not condemn us? "Prophets and righteous men" of old "desired to see the things which we see": we see them, and heed them not. Which of us carries his household with him in his fear of God? Which of us "disperses abroad and gives to the poor"? Which of us—for that is the test of tests—prays to God always? Alas, while we are as we are, the light that is around cannot shine within, and the eye that should see it is gradually losing its power.

2. But, while the example of Cornelius thus condemns, let us not lose the recollection that he still needed a conversion. How can men read this history, and talk of it as the record of the first Gentile conversion, and yet go their way to think a Gospel faith needless? Which of them would not count a Cornelius of this day safe for Heaven? Which of them would not consider that a just man, and a godly man, and a charitable man, and a devout man, was all, perhaps more than all, that can be required for salvation? It is becoming the fashion now to claim what is called a wide latitude for opinion and doctrine, and to say that, if a man only walks according to the light he has—or rather, if a man only lives

morally and does his duty—we need not trouble ourselves about his faith: “his can’t be wrong, whose life is in the right.” We must indeed think the conversion of Cornelius a strange misnomer; we must indeed regard the whole record—the visit of the Angel, the mission to Peter, the vision from the housetop, and the double journey—a mere waste of strength and trouble, needless for its object and unworthy of God; if we do not simply believe that “there is salvation in none other” than Christ; that “there is none other name under Heaven, given among men,” save His alone, “whereby we must be saved.” Not for the sake of judging others, but certainly for our own warning and quickening in the life of God, do we need, all of us, to remember that he whose conversion is before us was no scoffer, no profane person, no libertine, no profligate, but one who already “feared God with all his house, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” Do I address any who are practically resting for their salvation upon a moral or at least a decent life? men of middle age perhaps, immersed in life’s toils and cares; or men past middle age, sinking into the dulled perceptions and blunted enjoyments of the old; but who, in either case, have no real hold upon the revelations of the Gospel, no lively sense of their need of a Saviour’s blood, no true habitual communion with God their Father through the Holy Spirit? My brethren—I would say, with all earnestness and with all tenderness also, to such men—think of God sending a holy Apostle to the blameless and exemplary Cornelius, to tell him words whereby he and all his house might be saved. Does not this of itself teach you that a man’s soul, even a blameless man’s soul, needs saving, saving from sin and death, and saving in Christ only? Whatever you are, you can scarcely be a better man than Cornelius: and yet he needed Christ, and the knowledge of Christ, and the possession of Christ’s Spirit, to save his soul. The same word which was miraculously sent to him is yours all the time: this Book of God contains it: O study it! miss it not all your life long! but so apply yourself to it, with the simplicity and the earnestness which God loves, that, before you die, you may see its glorious light, and be guided by it into the haven where you would be!

3. Thus the example of Cornelius on the one hand, and the conversion of Cornelius on the other hand, may admonish us according to our need. And shall we not learn something also from the Apostle’s vision, by which he was made “willing in the day of Christ’s power,” to “open the door of faith to the Gentiles”? “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

(1) The words were spoken, first of all, of persons. Those Gentiles, who are as much God’s creatures and God’s children as are the natural seed of Abraham; those Gentiles, whom it is His pleasure now at once to receive into equality of position and equality of acceptance with the Jews, on the ground of the same faith in Christ Jesus which alone can enable a sinner of any race to draw near to God; think not of those, and speak not of these, and act not towards these, as though they were excluded from thy sympathy by a mere difference of blood and lineage. Be ready for that call which is now instant, to go to a Gentile home as its first Apostle and Evangelist. Such was the meaning of the text, as it first fell upon the ear of St. Peter in his vision on the housetop.

But what does it say to us? We are in no danger of needing its first lesson. We ourselves are Gentiles, and know that our one hope lies in the abolition of Mosaic ordinances, and the admission of all nations of men into the fold and Church of Christ. And yet we are for ever making to ourselves new distinctions, less excusable and far more arbitrary, on the ground of which we refuse to other men our sympathy and our charity.

Such, for example, are those differences of opinion and observance which divide

the Christian Church itself into parties within and sects without. How slow are we to give the right hand of fellowship to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! How apt are we to scrutinize the precise forms of words in which others express themselves, and to judge harshly and speak uncharitably of any who do not frame their ideas of truth exactly on our model! May we not apply to such cases the warning voice of this vision, "What God hath cleansed," by His own forgiving act, and by His own indwelling Spirit, "that call not thou common"? Frame not new conditions of Christian unity, beyond faith in the same Saviour and the visible fruits of the same Spirit. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God."

But we might almost wish that our divisions sprang only or chiefly out of differences of doctrine. At least it would show that we were interested and anxious about the things of God, however mistaken in our use of them. Alas! I fear it is more often from other causes that we disapprove and despise our brethren. How prone are we to make our own little circle, and then disparage all who are out of it! How ready to say, Such a person is beneath my notice; too low in birth or too humble in station to be fit company for me and mine! And thus even amongst those who are dwelling side by side in the same street of the same little town, and whom a stranger might imagine to be not far at least from an equality of position, there will be found parties within parties and distinctions within distinctions, severing them altogether from anything like unity, and splitting up the body of Christ, even in its smallest portions, into shreds and fragments as minute as they are arbitrary. Well may it be said to such creators of differences, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Be broad and generous in your sympathies, and love not to exclude but to combine.

And thus it is yet more visibly, when we reach the thought of the more destitute members of Christ's body. In what a contemptuous spirit do many deal with the poor! How slow are they to remember the Apostle's question, "Who maketh thee to differ? What hast thou which thou didst not receive?" How commonly do we think and judge of the poor, as though there were something wrong in being in need; as though the presence of poverty, apart from any question as to its cause, were not painful only but almost contaminating; as though it did away with the nominal unity of all human beings in a common Father and Redeemer and Sanctifier, and justified a tone and a manner altogether disparaging and contemptuous! "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." "What God hath cleansed," what He has not thought beneath the notice of His Providence and of His salvation, ought not surely to be below the regard of those who owe everything themselves to His bounty: "what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." We are all one, in the aspect of His creation and of His redemption: let us be one also in the aspect of our own sympathy, our own charity, and our own love!

(2) Finally, the words of the text have an application, just and true, not to persons only, but to things.

There is in all of us a strong tendency to disparage the sacredness of earthly life. We are apt to call it common. Some have done so in a religious but a morbid spirit. The light of eternity, presented perhaps in the midst of a career of thoughtlessness or sin, has dazzled the eye which was unused to it. The question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" has been answered to their ear, not as Christ

would have answered it ; not by bidding them do for Him what before they had done for themselves ; not by bidding them " in the calling wherein they were called, therein " henceforth " to abide with God " ; but rather by a call to " go out of the world," to frame for themselves a new set of duties and of interests, and to run away from temptations which ought rather to be met and conquered. What God has cleansed, His servants have sometimes called common. They could not understand how God has provided for each one of us a sacred calling in a common one ; how " the trivial round, the common task," may be so elevated and so sanctified by an all-pervading and all-constraining love of Christ, as to become that very circle of " good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in it."

Others, again, and more, we fear, in number, have called the occupations of life common, and in calling have made them so. It is easy enough to keep God out of our earthly life ; far, far easier than to bring Him into it. God has cleansed it. He has given, and He has sanctioned, and He has blessed, and He has sanctified all the relations of life and all its duties and all its offices, its work and its relaxations, its intercourse and its companionships, to be a daily offering, of innocence, of thankfulness, of happiness, of usefulness, to His honour no less than to our good. It is not of Him that it is common. But any one of us can make it so. We have only to follow inclination, we have only to let ourselves alone, we have only to make no effort and use no means ; and life will be common, every part of it, for us, even though in itself, and as God gave it, and as some actually find it, it is indeed " none other than the house of God," none other than the very " gate of Heaven ! "

This then is our struggle : how, without going out of the world, we may be kept in it from the evil. And this is the very happiness of knowing Christ. He who has passed through all, and has died to sanctify all, can both feel with our infirmities, and also raise us out of them. Miss not, Christian brethren, through neglect, procrastination, or sin, the attainment of this great salvation ! " Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found." " The night cometh " : then let the day be well used ! " The night cometh " : then let it not find you among those who, so far as the soul is concerned, have " stood all the day idle " ! " The night cometh " : then let it be to you a night of rest after toil, and not of gloom or confusion, not of fatal surprise, and not of outer darkness ! " Seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

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